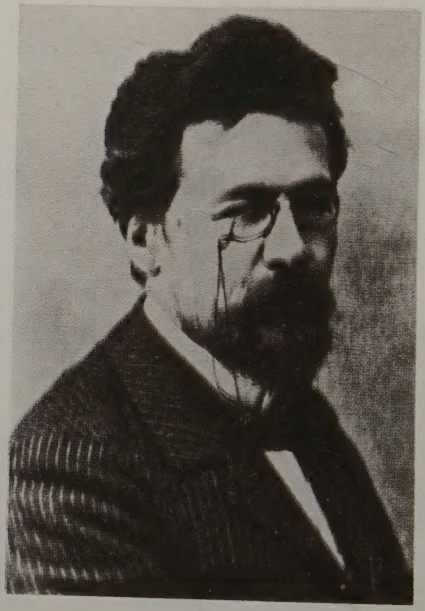
ANTON CHEKHOV

5

RADUGA PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW



ANTON CHEKHOV

COLLECTED WORKS IN 5 VOLUMES

VOLUME FIVE

PLAYS 1887–1903

Translated by *Kathleen Mary Cook* and *Ivy Litvinov*

Raduga Publishers
Moscow

Translation from the Russian
Designed by *Evgeny Sheshenin*

REQUEST TO READERS

Raduga Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design and any suggestions you may have for future publications.

Please send all your comments to 17, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

© Raduga Publishers 1990

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

CONTENTS

PLAYS (1887-1903) 7

Ivanov

A drama in four acts 9

The Bear

A one-act farce 85

The Anniversary

A one-act farce 103

The Seagull

A comedy in four acts 120

Uncle Vanya

Scenes from country life in four acts 182

The Three Sisters

A drama in four acts 240

The Cherry Orchard

A comedy in four acts 315

ANTON CHEKHOV by A. Zakharkin 377

PLAYS
1887-1903

IVANOV

A drama in four acts

CHARACTERS

NIKOLAI IVANOV, a member of the Peasant Affairs Board
ANNA, his wife (née Sarah Abrahamson)
COUNT MATVEI SHABELSKY, his maternal uncle
PAVEL LEBEDEV, Chairman of the Local Council
ZINAIDA, his wife
SASHA, his 20-year-old daughter
YEVGENY LVOV, a young council doctor
MARTHA BABAKINA, a young widow and landowner, the daughter of a rich merchant
DMITRI KOSYKH, an excise officer
MIKHAIL BORKIN, Ivanov's estate manager and distant relative
AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA, an old woman of indeterminate profession
YEGORUSHKA, a hanger-on in the Lebedev's household
FIRST GUEST
SECOND GUEST
THIRD GUEST
FOURTH GUEST
PYOTR, Ivanov's footman
GAVRILA, the Lebedevs' footman
GUESTS OF BOTH SEXES
SERVANTS

The action takes place in the provinces of Central Russia

ACT ONE

The garden on Ivanov's estate. On the left is the facade of the house with a terrace. One window is open. In front of the terrace is a broad semicircular area from which avenues lead off directly and to the right into the park. On the right are garden chairs and tables. A lamp is lit on one table. It is dusk. The curtain rises to the sounds of a duet for piano and cello being practised inside the house.

I

Ivanov and Borkin

Ivanov is sitting at a table reading a book. Borkin comes out of the garden in high boots carrying a gun. He is slightly tipsy. Seeing Ivanov, he tiptoes up to him and aims the gun at his face

IVANOV *(sees Borkin, starts and jumps up).* For heaven's sake, Misha! You gave me a real fright. I'm upset enough as it is without your stupid tricks. *(Sits down.)* He thinks it's a big joke.

BORKIN *(roaring with laughter).* Alright, alright. I'm sorry. *(Sits down next to him.)* I won't do it again, honest I won't. *(Takes off his cap.)* It's hot. Believe it or not, old chap, but I've walked eleven miles in about three hours. I'm worn out. Just feel how my heart's beating.

IVANOV *(reading).* Alright, only some other time.

BORKIN. No, feel it now. *(Takes his hand and puts it on his chest.)* See? Thump, thump, thump, thump. That means I've got heart trouble. Might pop off any minute. Would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOV. I'm reading. Some other time.

BORKIN. No, tell me honestly, would you be sorry if I suddenly popped off. Would you be sorry if I died?

IVANOV. Stop pestering me!

BORKIN. Do tell us, old chap. Would you be sorry?

IVANOV. I'm sorry you smell of vodka. It's disgusting.

BORKIN *(laughs).* Do I really? That's strange. Actually it's not strange at all. I met the investigator in Plesniki, and we knocked back about eight glasses, I must confess. Drinking's no good for you, of course. It's bad, isn't it? Eh? Bad for you?

IVANOV. This is intolerable. You're behaving disgracefully, Misha, can't you understand!

BORKIN. Alright, alright. I'm sorry! Just sit there, if you must. *(Gets up and walks off.)* Funny lot, can't say a word to them. *(Comes back.)* Oh, yes! I nearly forgot. Eighty-two roubles, please.

IVANOV. What eighty-two roubles?

BORKIN. To pay the workmen tomorrow.

IVANOV. I haven't got it.

BORKIN. Thank you kindly! *(Mimics him.)* I haven't got it. But they have to be paid. Don't they?

IVANOV. I don't know. I haven't got a penny today. Wait till the first, when I get my salary.

BORKIN. What's the use of talking to people like you! The workmen are coming for their money tomorrow morning, not on the first!

IVANOV. What can I do about it? Even if I'm hanged, drawn and quartered... And why do you have this infuriating habit of pestering me just when I'm reading, writing or...

BORKIN. I ask you: do the workmen have to be paid or not? Bah, it's no good talking to you! *(Waves his hand in disgust.)* You call yourselves gentlemen farmers, dammit. And talk about rational use of the land... Yet you've got three thousand acres and not a penny in your pocket. A wine-cellar and no corkscrew. I'll go and sell your troika tomorrow! That I will! I've sold the oats before the harvest and tomorrow I'll sell the rye too. *(Strides round the stage.)* You think I won't have the nerve, do you? Well, you're wrong. I've got all the nerve I need.

II

Shabelsky (off-stage) and Anna. Shabelsky's voice saying: "It's quite impossible to play with you. You've got as good an ear for music as a stuffed pike, and your *touché* is appalling."

ANNA *(Appears at the open window).* Who was talking here just now? Is that you, Misha? Why are you striding about like that?

BORKIN. That *Nicholas-voilà* of yours will put you through your paces alright.

ANNA. Listen, Misha, tell them to bring some hay for croquet.

BORKIN *(waves his hand).* Leave me alone, please.

ANNA. Well, I never, listen to him. That's not a nice way to talk. If you want women to love you, you must never get angry or pompous in their presence. *(To her husband.)* Let's romp in the hay, Nikolai!

IVANOV. It's bad for you to stand by an open window, Anna. Don't do it, please. *(Shouts.)* Close the window, Uncle!

The window is closed

BORKIN. And don't forget you must pay Lebedev his interest the day after tomorrow.

IVANOV. I know. I'm going there today and I'll ask him to wait. *(Looks at his watch.)*

BORKIN. When are you going?

IVANOV. Rightaway.

BORKIN *(excitedly).* Wait a minute! It's Sasha's birthday today, isn't it? Tut, tut, tut. And I forgot all about it. What a memory, eh? *(Jumps up.)* I'm coming too. *(Sings.)* I'm a'coming. I'll have a good wash, chew a bit of paper, swallow three drops of ammonia and be as right as rain. My dear fellow, mother of mine, angel of my heart, here you are grouching away, worrying yourself silly all the

time, in a constant state of meloncollars, when we could be pulling all sorts of things off! I'm ready to do anything for you. I'll even marry Martha Babakina for you, if you like. What about that? You get half the dowry, No, no, not half, take the whole lot!

IVANOV. Stop talking such nonsense.

BORKIN. No, honestly! Like me to marry Martha? Split the dowry fifty fifty? Oh, what's the good of talking to you? How can you understand? *(Mimics him.)* 'Stop talking such nonsense.' You're a good chap alright, clever, but you don't have what it takes. You don't think big, see? Otherwise we could really get going, have a whale of a time. You're a worrier, a moaner, but if you were a normal person, you could make a million by next year. For instance, if I only had two thousand three hundred roubles now, I could make twenty thousand in two weeks. Don't you believe me? Think that's nonsense too? Well, it isn't. You give me two thousand three hundred roubles, and in a week's time I'll pay you twenty thousand back. Ovsyanov's selling that strip of land on the other side of the river, right opposite us, for two thousand three hundred roubles. If we buy it, both banks will be ours. And if both banks are ours, we have the right to dam the river. Right? We're building a watermill and, when they hear we're going to dam the river everyone who lives downstream will raise a terrible hullabaloo. So we say to them "Kommen Sie hier, if you don't want the dam, cough up the necessary." See? Zarevsky's factory'll give five thousand, Korolkov three thousand, the monastery another five...

IVANOV. Those are dirty tricks, Misha. Keep them to yourself, unless you want us to fall out.

BORKIN *(sits down at the table).* Of course! I might have known! Won't do anything yourself and won't let me either...

III

Enter Shabelsky and Lvov

SHABELSKY *(coming out of the house with Lvov).* Doctors are just as bad as lawyers except that lawyers only rob you, whereas doctors rob you and knock you off. Present company excluded, of course. *(Sits down on a sofa.)* Charlatans, exploiters. There may be exceptions to the rule in some Arcadia or other, but ... I've spent a good twenty thousand on doctors in my time and never met a single one who wasn't an outright scoundrel.

BORKIN *(to Ivanov).* Yes, you do nothing yourself and stop me from doing anything too. That's why we've got no money.

SHABELSKY. I repeat, present company excluded. There may be some exceptions, although... *(Yawns.)*

IVANOV *(closing his book).* What do you advise, Doctor?

LVOV *(looking round at the window).* The same as this morning. She must go to the Crimea at once. *(Paces round the stage.)*

SHABELSKY *(bursts out laughing).* The Crimea! Why don't you and I take up medicine, Misha. It's so easy. As soon as some Madame Angot or Ophelia begins to hem or cough with boredom, you just take a piece of paper and prescribe in accordance with medical rules: first a young doctor, then a trip to the Crimea, then a Tartar or two...

IVANOV *(to the Count).* Do stop needling, you old needler! *(To Lvov).* You need money to go to the Crimea. Even supposing I could find it, she refuses point-blank to go.

LVOV. Yes, she does.

Pause

BORKIN. Is Mrs Ivanov really so ill that she needs to go to the Crimea, Doctor?

LVOV *(looking round at the window).* Yes, she's got consumption.

BORKIN. Phew! That's bad. I could see from her face that she hadn't got long to go.

LVOV. Don't speak so loudly. She can hear in the house.

Pause

BORKIN *(sighing).* That's life for you! A person's life is like a flower blooming in a field. Then along comes a goat, gobbles it up and that's the end of it.

SHABELSKY. It's all sheer nonsense. *(Yawns.)* Nonsense and roguery.

Pause

BORKIN. And here I am, ladies and gents, trying to teach old Nicholas to make money. I've just given him a wonderful idea, but my gun-powder has fallen on damp ground as usual. It's a hopeless task. Just look at him. Did you ever see such a picture of melancholy, bad temper, heartache, misery and mopes...

SHABELSKY *(gets up and stretches).* You think up plans for everyone, clever sausage, and tell everyone how to live, but you've never taught me a thing. Go on, brainy bonce, show me the way to make a fortune.

BORKIN *(gets up).* I'm going for a dip. Goodbye, ladies and gents. *(To the Count.)* There are twenty ways for you. If I were you I'd make a good twenty thousand in no time at all. *(Walks away.)*

SHABELSKY *(goes after him).* How would you do that? You teach me how.

BORKIN. There's nothing to teach. It's very simple. *(Comes back.)* Give us a rouble.

Ivanov silently hands him a rouble

Merci! (To the Count). You've got plenty of trumps in your hand.

SHABELSKY *(going after him).* What trumps?

BORKIN. If I were you I'd make thirty thousand in no time at all, if not more. *(Exit with the Count.)*

IVANOV (after a pause). Too many people, too much talking, having to answer stupid questions. I'm sick and tired of all that, Doctor. I've grown so irritable, short-tempered, rude and petty that I hardly know myself anymore. Sometimes my head aches for days on end, I can't sleep and there's a ringing in my ears. But there's nothing I can do about it. Positively nothing.

LVOV. I must have a serious talk with you.

IVANOV. Go on then.

LVOV. It's about your wife. *(He sits down.)* She refuses to go to the Crimea, but she would go with you.

IVANOV *(after a moment's thought).* It would take even more money for the two of us to go. And they wouldn't give me much leave. I've already taken my leave for this year.

LVOV. We'll assume that really is the case and proceed further. The best treatment for consumption is peace and quiet, but your wife does not have a moment's peace. She is constantly upset by your attitude towards her. Forgive me, I am agitated and must speak frankly. Your behaviour is killing her.

Pause

Please allow me to think better of you, sir.

IVANOV. All that is true, yes. I am probably terribly to blame, but my thoughts are so confused, my heart is gripped in a kind of lethargy, and I just can't understand myself. I don't understand other people or myself. *(Looks up at the window.)* We might be overheard. Let's go for a walk.

They get up

I'd like to tell you everything right from the beginning, my

dear friend, but it's such a long and complicated story, it would take all night at least.

They start walking

Anna is a marvellous, remarkable woman. For my sake she changed her religion, deserted her mother and father, renounced her fortune and if I'd asked for a hundred other sacrifices, she would have made them without batting an eyelid. I am not at all remarkable and have sacrificed nothing. But it's a long story... The fact is, my dear doctor *(hesitates)* that ... to cut it short, I got married because I was madly in love and promised to love her forever... Five years have passed since then and she still loves me, but I... *(Shrugs.)* You tell me she's going to die soon, but I don't feel any love or pity, just a kind of emptiness and exhaustion. To anyone else it probably looks awful. I just don't understand what's going on inside me...

They walk away down an avenue

IV

Shabelsky, later Anna

SHABELSKY *(enters laughing).* Well, I never, he's not a scalliwag at all, he's a genius, a virtuoso! They should put up a monument to him. A person who combines the rottenness of his day in all its forms: the lawyer, the doctor, the train-crasher and the cashier. *(Sits down on the bottom step of the terrace.)* And he's never had any kind of education, that's the remarkable thing. Just think what a brilliant rascal he'd be with a bit of culture, an arts degree, say. "You could make twenty thousand in a week," he says. "You've got the ace of trumps in your hand," he says, "your noble title." *(Laughs).* "Any girl with a dowry would marry you."

Anna opens the window and looks down

"How would you like me to ask sweet Martha for you?" he says. *Qui est-ce que c'est Martha?* Ah, it's what's-her-name, Balabalkina ... or is it Babakalkina? The one who looks like a washerwoman.

ANNA. Is that you, Count?

SHABELSKY. What is it?

Anna laughs

(With a Jewish accent.) Vot you laffin about?

ANNA. I've just remembered something you said. When you were talking at lunch, remember? A thief who's been pardoned, a horse... What was it?

SHABELSKY. A christened Jew, a pardoned thief and a cured horse are all worth the same.

ANNA *(laughing).* Even your jokes are spiteful. You are a very spiteful person. *(Seriously.)* I mean it, Count, you really are spiteful. Living with you is miserable and depressing. You're forever grumbling and grousing. Everyone's a rogue or a scoundrel. Tell me honestly, Count. Have you ever said a good word about anyone?

SHABELSKY. What sort of exam is this?

ANNA. You and I have been living under the same roof for five years now, and I've never heard you talk about anyone calmly, without irritation or ridicule. What terrible thing have they done to you? Surely you don't think you're better than everyone else?

SHABELSKY. Of course I don't. I'm just the same rascal, the same swine as the rest of them. *Mauvais ton,* a silly old sausage. I'm always telling myself off. Who am I now? I ask you. I used to be rich, free and a little bit happy, but now ... I'm a sponger, a parasite, a faceless clown. When I rage and revile, people laugh in my face. And when I laugh, they shake their heads sadly and say: "The old fellow's off his rocker." But most of the time they take no notice of me at all.

ANNA *(quietly).* That cry again...

SHABELSKY. Who's crying?

ANNA. That owl. It cries every evening.

SHABELSKY. Well, let it. Things can't get any worse than they are. *(Stretches.)* Ah, Sarah, my dear, if only I could win a hundred thousand, say, I'd show you a thing or two. I'd be off like a shot. I'd get away from this dump, this bread of charity, and never set foot in it again till Doomsday.

ANNA. And what would you do, if you won it?

SHABELSKY *(thinking for a moment).* First of all I'd go to Moscow and listen to the gypsies. Then ... then I'd go to Paris. I'd rent a room there and go to the Russian church...

ANNA. And what else?

SHABELSKY. I'd sit for days on my wife's grave and think. And I'd go on sitting like that on her grave until I kicked the bucket myself. My wife's buried in Paris.

Pause

ANNA. It's terribly boring. How about playing a duet?

SHABELSKY. Alright, get the music ready.

V

Shabelsky, Ivanov and Lvov

IVANOV *(appears on the avenue with Lvov).* You, dear friend, only graduated last year. You are still young and energetic, but I am thirty-five. I have the right to give you advice. Never marry Jewesses, psychopaths or blue-stockings. Choose yourself something ordinary, dull, with no bright colours, no unnecessary sounds. And in general make sure your whole life follows a set pattern. The duller and more monotonous the background, the better. Don't battle against hordes single-handed, dear chap, don't tilt at windmills, don't bang your head against brick walls. And

may the Good Lord protect you from all sorts of rational farming, experimental schools and impassioned speeches. Lock yourself up in your shell and get on with your own simple God-sent job. It's much warmer, healthier and more honest. But the life I've led, how exhausting it is! Oh, how exhausting! So many mistakes, so much that is unfair, absurd. *(Irritably to the Count whom he has just noticed.)* Why do you always get in the way, Uncle, and never let a person have a quiet chat!

SHABELSKY *(tearfully).* No peace for the wicked! *(Jumps up and goes into the house.)*

IVANOV *(shouts after him).* Sorry. I'm sorry. *(To Lvov.)* Why did I upset him like that? I really have gone to pieces. I must do something about myself. I really must...

LVOV *(tensely).* I have listened to what you had to say and forgive me, but I shall speak plainly and not beat about the bush. There is so much heartless egoism, so much callous indifference in your voice, your tone, to say nothing of your words. Someone very close to you is perishing because she is close to you, her days are numbered, and yet you ... you feel nothing, just go around giving advice and posturing. I just can't tell you, I don't have the words to express it, but ... I dislike you intensely.

IVANOV. You may be right. It's easier for a third party to see. Quite possibly you do understand me. I am probably very much to blame. *(Listens.)* That sounds like the horses. I'll go and put my things on. *(Walks towards the house, then stops.)* You don't like me, Doctor, and you don't hide the fact. That is to your credit. *(Goes into the house.)*

LVOV *(alone).* My wretched character. Missed another chance to have a proper talk with him. Can't speak to him coolly. As soon as I open my mouth and say something, everything here *(points to his chest)* churns up and chokes me, makes my tongue stick to my palate. I hate that Tartuffe, that hypocritical scoundrel with all my heart. Off

he goes. When the one thing his poor wife longs for is to have him by her side. She worships the ground he treads on, begs him to spend just one evening with her, but he can't. He feels stifled, constricted at home, poor fellow. If he were to spend a single evening at home he would put a bullet through his brains out of boredom. He needs space, poor creature, to organise his next dirty trick. I know why you go to those Lebedevs every evening! I know alright!

VI

Lvov, Ivanov (in coat and hat), Shabelsky and Anna

SHABELSKY *(coming out of the house with Ivanov and Anna).* But it's so heartless, Nicholas! You drive off every evening and leave us on our own. We go to bed at eight out of sheer boredom. It's a disgrace, that's what it is. Why are you allowed to go visiting and we're not? Why, may I ask?

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count! Let him go, let him...

IVANOV *(to his wife).* Where could you go in your state of health? You're ill, and you shouldn't be outside after sunset. Ask the doctor. You're not a child, Anna, my dear, you must be sensible. *(To the Count.)* Why do you want to go there?

SHABELSKY. I don't mind where I go, into the fires of hell or a crocodile's jaws, as long as I don't stay here. I'm bored! Bored stiff! Everyone's sick of me. You leave me here, so she won't be lonely, but I've tormented her to death!

ANNA. Leave him alone, Count, I tell you! Let him go if he enjoys himself there.

IVANOV. Anna, why say a thing like that? You know I'm not going there to enjoy myself! I've got to talk about the loan.

ANNA. I don't know why you have to try to justify yourself. Just go! Who's stopping you?

IVANOV. Come now, everyone, let's stop bickering like this. Surely we don't have to, do we?

SHABELSKY *(tearfully).* Nicholas, my dear chap, do let me come with you, please! Taking a look at all those fools and rascals might cheer me up. I haven't been anywhere since Easter!

IVANOV *(angrily).* Alright then, come along! You do get on my nerves, all of you!

SHABELSKY. Can I? Oh, *merci, merci! (Takes him happily by the arm and draws him aside.)* Can I wear your straw hat?

IVANOV. Yes, only hurry up, please!

The Count runs into the house

You do get on my nerves! But what am I saying? I shouldn't speak to you like that, Anna. I never used to. Please forgive me, Anna. I'll be back by one.

ANNA. Stay at home, Kolya, dear.

IVANOV *(agitated).* My poor, sweet, darling wife, I beg you, don't stop me going out in the evenings. It's unfair and cruel of me, but grant me this unfairness! It's so painful for me at home. As soon as the sun goes down, I feel so depressed. So miserable. Don't ask me why. I don't know myself. Honestly, I don't! I get depressed here, so I go to the Lebedevs and it's even worse there. Then I come back and get depressed here again, and so it goes on all night. It's hopeless!

ANNA. Stay here, Kolya. We'll talk like we used to. Have supper together and read. The old codger and I have learnt lots of duets for you. *(She embraces him.)* Do stay!

Pause

I don't understand you. This has been going on for a year now. What's made you change?

IVANOV. I don't know, I don't know.

ANNA. And why don't you want me to go out with you in the evening?

IVANOV. If you really must know, I'll tell you. It's rather cruel, but I'd better tell you. When I feel depressed, I ... I begin not to love you. So I run away from you too. Anyway, I just have to get out of the house.

ANNA. Depression? I see. You know what, Kolya? Try to sing and laugh and get angry like you used to. Stay at home and we'll have a good laugh and drink our homemade wine and drive all your troubles away. I'll sing, would you like that? Or we'll go into your study and sit in the dark, like we used to, and you can tell me all about your depression... Your eyes have that suffering look! I'll gaze into them and weep, then we'll both feel better. *(Laughing and crying.)* Or what is it, Kolya? The flowers bloom again each spring, but joy has gone? Is that it? Well, you'd better be going.

IVANOV. Pray for me, Anna! *(He walks off, stops and thinks for a moment.)* No, I can't! *(Exit.)*

ANNA. Off you go. *(Sits down at the table.)*

LVOV *(pacing round the stage).* You must make it a rule, Mrs Ivanov, to go inside at the stroke of six and not to come out again until morning. The evening damp is bad for you.

ANNA. Aye, aye, sir.

LVOV. What do you mean "aye, aye, sir"? I'm perfectly serious.

ANNA. But I don't want to be serious. *(Coughs.)*

LVOV. There, you see. You've started coughing.

VII

Lvov, Anna and Shabelsky

SHABELSKY *(comes out of the house in his coat and hat).* Where's Nikolai? Are the horses ready? *(Walks over quickly and kisses Anna's hand.)* Goodnight, my angel!

(Pulls a face.) Gewalt. Excuss me, pliss. *(Exit quickly.)*

LVOV. Very funny.

Pause. An accordion is playing in the distance

ANNA. How miserable it is! The coachman and the cooks are having a ball, but here am I—left all alone. What are you pacing about for like that, Doctor? Come and sit over here.

LVOV. I can't sit down.

Pause

ANNA. They're playing "Goldfinch" in the kitchen. *(Sings.)* "Goldfinch, goldfinch. Where've you been? Drinking vodka on the green."

Pause

Do you have a father and mother, Doctor?

LVOV. My father's dead, but my mother's still alive.

ANNA. Do you miss your mother?

LVOV. I don't have time for that.

ANNA *(laughs)*. Flowers bloom again every spring, but there is no joy. Who said that to me? Now let's see. I think it was Nikolai himself. *(Listens.)* That owl's crying again.

LVOV. Well, let it cry.

ANNA. I'm beginning to think fate has overcharged me, Doctor. Lots of people who are probably no better than me are happy and pay nothing for their happiness. But I have paid for absolutely everything. And paid so dear. Why take such high interest from me? You are so careful with me, my dear man, so tactful and afraid of telling me the truth, but do you think I don't know what's the matter with me? I know perfectly well. But it's depressing to talk about that. *(With a Jewish accent.)* Forgiff me, pliss! Are you any good at telling funny stories?

LVOV. No, I'm not.

ANNA. Nikolai is. And I'm beginning to be surprised

at how unfair people are: why not give love for love, why repay truth with falsehood? How long do you think my father and mother will go on hating me? They live thirty miles away, but I can sense their hatred day and night, even in my sleep! And what am I supposed to think about Nikolai's depression? He says he doesn't love me in the evenings when he feels depressed. I understand that and I can accept it. But what if he's stopped loving me completely! That's impossible, of course, but what if he has? No, no, I mustn't even think of it. *(Sings.)* "Goldfinch, goldfinch where've you been?" *(Shudders.)* What awful thoughts I'm having! You're not married, Doctor, so there are a lot of things you can't understand.

LVOV. You're surprised... *(Sits down beside her.)* No, I'm the one who's surprised. Surprised that you, an honest, intelligent, almost saintly person, could have let yourself be so cruelly deceived and dragged away to this owls' nest? What are you doing here? What have you got in common with that cold, heartless ... but leaving aside your husband, what have you got in common with these empty, vulgar people? Oh, dear Lord! That rusty, crazy old Count with his constant grumbling, that rascally scoundrel Misha with his repulsive face... Tell me, what are you doing here? What brought you here?

ANNA *(laughing).* That's exactly how he used to talk. Almost word for word. Only his eyes are larger, and when he started talking passionately about something, they used to glow like coals... Do go on!

LVOV *(rises and waves a hand).* What can I say? Let's go inside.

ANNA. You say that Nikolai is this, that and the other. How do you know? Is six months long enough to find out what someone is like? He's a fine person, Doctor, and I'm only sorry you didn't know him two or three years ago. He's miserable and taciturn now and never does anything, but in the old days... How marvellous it was! I fell in love

with him at first sight. *(Laughs.)* Just took one look and, snap, I was caught in the mousetrap. "Come with me," he said. And I cut everything off myself, you know, like cutting off dead leaves with secateurs, and went with him.

Pause

But it's different now. Now he goes to the Lebedevs to enjoy himself with other women, and I ... sit in the garden and listen to the owl hooting.

The tapping of the night-watchman

Do you have any brothers, Doctor?

LVOV. No.

Anna sobs

What is it? What's the matter?

ANNA *(gets up).* I can't stand it, Doctor. I'm going there.

LVOV. Where?

ANNA. Where he's gone. I'm going. Tell them to harness the horses. *(Runs into the house.)*

LVOV. No, I positively refuse to work in these circumstances. They don't pay me a penny, and they break my heart. I refuse! I've had enough! *(Goes into the house.)*

Curtain

ACT TWO

A drawing room in the Lebedevs' house, which opens into the garden. Doors right and left. Old expensive furniture. A chandelier, candelabra and pictures all under covers

I

Zinaida, Kosykh, Avdotia Nazarovna, Yegorushka, Gavrila, a chambermaid, elderly women guests, young ladies and Babakina.

Zinaida is sitting on the sofa. The old women are sitting in armchairs on either side of her. The young men and women are also seated. Kosykh, Avdotia Nazarovna and Yegorushka are among those playing cards at the back near the door into the garden. Gavrila is standing by the door on the right. The chambermaid is offering people titbits from a tray. Throughout the act people keep circulating from the garden through the door on the right and back. Babakina comes through this door and walks over to Zinaida

ZINAIDA *(effusively).* Hello, my dear...

BABAKINA. Hello, Mrs Lebedev! Congratulations on your daughter's birthday.

They kiss

God grant that...

ZINAIDA. Thank you, my dear, I'm so pleased. Tell me, how are you?

BABAKINA. Very well, thanking you kindly. *(Sits down on the sofa beside her).* Hello, young people!

The guests get up and bow

FIRST GUEST *(laughing).* "Young people"! Surely you don't call yourself old, do you?

BABAKINA *(sighing).* Ah, but I couldn't call myself young.

FIRST GUEST *(laughing respectfully).* Oh, come now, forgive me. You may be a widow, but you could give any young lady a ten point lead.

Gavrila brings Babakina some tea

ZINAIDA *(to Gavrila).* Fancy serving tea just on its own! You should offer them jam too. Gooseberry, say.

BABAKINA. Please don't bother, thanking you kindly.

Pause

FIRST GUEST. Did you come here through Mushkino?

BABAKINA. No, through Zaimishche. The road's better.

FIRST GUEST. So it is.

KOSYKH. Two spades.

YEGORUSHKA. Pass.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Pass.

SECOND GUEST. Pass.

BABAKINA. Lottery tickets, my dear Zinaida, have gone up again. Did you ever hear of such a thing: the first issue is already worth two hundred and seventy, and the second almost two hundred and fifty. It's never happened before...

ZINAIDA *(sighing).* That's good news, for them that has plenty.

BABAKINA. I wouldn't say so, my dear. They may be worth a lot, but it's not a good thing to invest your capital in them. The insurance alone costs the earth.

ZINAIDA. That's true, but all the same, my dear, one lives in hope... *(Sighs.)* God is merciful.

THIRD GUEST. From my point of view, *mesdames,* I believe that it is a very bad thing to have capital at all these days. Securities give extremely low interest, and it's highly dangerous to invest your money. To my mind, *mesdames,* a person who has capital today is far worse off than someone, *mesdames,* who...

BABAKINA *(sighing).* That's true!

First guest yawns

Is it good manners to yawn in front of ladies?

FIRST GUEST. *Pardon, mesdames,* I didn't mean to.

Zinaida gets up and walks over to the door on the right. A long silence

YEGORUSHKA. Two hearts.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Pass.

SECOND GUEST. Pass.

KOSYKH. Pass.

BABAKINA *(in an aside).* It's enough to bore you stiff.

II

Enter Zinaida and Lebedev

ZINAIDA *(quietly, coming through the door on the right with Lebedev).* Sitting on your own there! Like a prima donna! Come in here with the guests! *(Sits down in her former place.)*

LEBEDEV *(yawns).* Ah, well, these things are sent to try us! *(Notices Babakina.)* Good Heavens, there's Madam Marmalade! Rahatlukum! *(Greets her.)* And how are we today, dear lady?

BABAKINA. Thanking you kindly.

LEBEDEV. Well, thank the Lord! Thank the Lord! *(Sits down in an armchair.)* Now, then, let's see. Gavrila!

Gavrila brings him vodka in one glass and water in another. He drinks the vodka and follows it down with the water

FIRST GUEST. Your good health!

LEBEDEV. What good health is that! I just thank my lucky stars that I haven't kicked the bucket yet. *(To his wife.)* Zyuzyushka, where's our birthday girl?

KOSYKH *(plaintively).* Why didn't we get that trick, just tell me. *(Jumps up.)* Why the devil did we have to go and lose it?

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(Jumps up and cries angrily).* Because if you can't play, don't sit down at the card-table. Fancy leading with their suit! That's why you got left with that good for nothing ace!

They both run front stage from the table

KOSYKH *(plaintively).* Listen to her, everyone. Here's me with the ace, king, queen and eight of diamonds, the

ace of spades and one small heart, see? And she couldn't even bid a little slam! I called no trumps...

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(interrupts him).* It was me that called no trumps! You bid two no trumps.

KOSYKH. It's infuriating! Pardon me, but you have ... I have ... you have ... *(To Lebedev.)* Judge for yourself, Pavel Kirillovich. I had the ace, king, queen and eight of diamonds.

LEBEDEV *(puts his hands over his ears).* Leave me alone, for goodness sake, leave me alone.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(shouting).* I called no trumps, not you!

KOSYKH *(furiously).* Damn me if I ever sit down to play with that old sturgeon again! *(Walks away quickly into the garden.)*

The second guest follows him, leaving Yegorushka at the table

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Ugh! It's enough to give you a fever. Old sturgeon indeed! You're the old sturgeon yourself!

BABAKINA. You've lost your temper, Granny.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(notices Babakina and throws up her hands).* My duckie, my pretty puss. She's here and I didn't notice her, blind old bat that I am. My little dove. *(Kisses her on the shoulder and sits down beside her.)* Isn't that nice! Let me take a look at you, my white swan! Touch wood! Touch wood!

LEBEDEV. Phew, what a mouthful. You'd do better to find her a husband.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. I will, don't you worry. I won't rest my bones until I've found one for her and dear Sasha! Won't rest my bones. *(Sighs.)* Only where can you find them nowadays? There they sit, feathers drooping like wet roosters!

THIRD GUEST. Not a very happy comparison. In my opinion, *mesdames,* if the young men of today prefer a

bachelor's life, it's the social conditions that are to blame.

LEBEDEV. Now then, let's not start philosophising. I can't stand that!

III

Enter Sasha

SASHA *(comes in and walks over to her father).* The weather's so marvellous, but you're all sitting in this stuffy room.

ZINAIDA. Sasha, didn't you see that Martha Babakina is here?

SASHA. I'm sorry. *(Walks over and greets her.)*

BABAKINA. You've gone all hoity-toity, Sasha. Never come and see me now. *(They kiss).* Happy birthday, my darling.

SASHA. Thank you. *(Sits down beside her father.)*

LEBEDEV. Yes, Avdotia Nazarovna, it's hard to find a husband nowadays. It's even harder to find a best man. The young men of today, no offence meant, of course, are all a bit sour, a bit overcooked, bless them. They don't know how to dance, or talk, or even drink properly.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Well, they're all good enough at drinking, given half the chance...

LEBEDEV. There's nothing hard about drinking. Even a horse can drink. It's drinking properly that matters. In our time we had lectures all day long, but in the evening we'd go out on the tiles and spin like tops till dawn. Dance, amuse young ladies, and knock back a glass or two. *(He snaps a finger against his neck.)* And sometimes we'd yack away and philosophise until our tongues almost fell out. But nowadays... *(Waves his hand.)* I don't know what they are ... neither fish, nor fowl, nor good red herring. There's only one decent fellow in the whole district, but he's married *(sighs)* and he's started to crack up, it seems.

BABAKINA. Who's that?

LEBEDEV. Nikolai Ivanov.

BABAKINA. Yes, he's a good man *(makes a face)*, but he always looks so miserable.

ZINAIDA. And it's not surprising either, my dear! *(Sighs)*. What a terrible mistake he made, poor man! Married his little Jewess expecting to get oodles of money from her parents, poor thing, but just the opposite happened. When she changed her religion, her father and mother cursed her and refused to have anything more to do with her. So he didn't get a penny. Now he's sorry, but it's too late.

SASHA. That's not true, Mother.

BABAKINA *(heatedly)*. Why isn't it true, Sasha? Everybody knows it. Why would he marry a Jewess unless he was after her money? Aren't there enough nice Russian girls? He made a mistake, my dear, a mistake. *(Animatedly.)* And, my goodness, he's making her pay for it. What a laugh. He comes home from somewhere and really lets fly: "Your father and mother tricked me! Get out of my house!" But where can she go? Her parents won't take her back. She can't be a chambermaid 'cause she hasn't the training. On he goes at her, until the Count stands up for her. If it weren't for the Count, he'd have driven her into the grave long ago.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Sometimes he locks her up in the cellar and says: "Eat garlic, you so-and-so." And she eats it until she stinks to death of it.

Laughter

SASHA. It's a lie, Papa!

LEBEDEV. Well, what of it? Let them lie if they must. *(Shouts)*. Gavrila!

Gavrila brings him vodka and water

ZINAIDA. And that's why he's ruined, poor man. His

affairs are in an awful state, my dear. If Borkin didn't look after the estate, he and his Jewess would starve. *(Sighs.)* And how we've suffered because of him, my dear. God only knows! Would you believe it, he's owed us nine thousand for three years!

BABAKINA *(horrified).* Nine thousand!

ZINAIDA. Yes, it was my dear Pasha who saw fit to lend it to him. He doesn't know whom to lend to and whom not. I'm not talking about the capital, heaven knows, but if only he'd pay the interest properly!

SASHA *(heatedly).* You've said that so many times before, Mamma!

ZINAIDA. Well, so what? Why should you defend him?

SASHA *(stands up).* How can you say such a thing about a man who has never done you any harm? What has he done to you?

THIRD GUEST. Allow me to say a few words, Miss Lebedev! I respect Nikolai Ivanov and have always considered it an honour, but, speaking *entre nous,* I think he's an adventurer.

SASHA. And good luck to you, if that's what you think.

THIRD GUEST. And to prove it, I should like to quote the following fact, which was conveyed to me by his *attaché* or, so to say, *cicerone* Borkin. Two years ago during the cattle plague, he bought up a lot of cows, insured them...

ZINAIDA. Yes, yes, yes! I remember that. Someone told me about it too.

THIRD GUEST. He insured them, mind, then infected them with the plague and collected the insurance.

SASHA. That's all nonsense. Nonsense! Nobody bought or infected any cows. It was Borkin himself who thought up that plan and boasted about it everywhere. When Ivanov got to hear of it, he had Borkin apologising

for the next fortnight. Ivanov's only fault is his weak character. He hasn't got the strength to get rid of that Borkin, and he trusts people too much. They've filched and plundered everything he had. Anyone who felt like it could make a packet out of his well-meaning schemes.

LEBEDEV. That's enough, you hot-head!

SASHA. But why do they talk all that nonsense? Ah, yes, because everything's so boring! Ivanov, Ivanov, Ivanov—there's nothing else to talk about. *(Walks over to the door, then comes back.)* I'm amazed! *(To the young men.)* I'm positively amazed at your patience, gentlemen! Aren't you bored sitting around like that? The whole air is stiff with boredom! Say something, for goodness sake, entertain the young ladies, make an effort! If you haven't anything to talk about except Ivanov, surely you could at least smile, sing, dance or something...

LEBEDEV *(laughing).* That's right, give them a good ticking-off.

SASHA. But one thing I do ask of you, please! If you don't want to dance or laugh or sing, if all that's too tiresome, I beg you, I implore you, just once in your life, for a change, make a real effort all together and think up something witty, clever, say something daring or risqué even, as long as it's original, amusing! Or get together and do some small thing, hardly noticeable, but just a little bit special to make young ladies look at you and exclaim "ooh!" for once in your life. Listen, you want to be liked, but why don't you try to be likeable? Oh, gentlemen! You're no good, no good, no good. The very sight of you makes the flies faint and the lamps start to smoke. No good, no good! I've told you hundreds of times and I'll tell you hundreds more, you're no good, no good!

IV

Enter Ivanov and Shabelsky

SHABELSKY *(enters through the door on the right with Ivanov).* Who's that declaiming here? You, Sasha? *(Laughs and presses her hand.)* Happy birthday, my angel. May you have a long life and never be born again.

ZINAIDA *(joyfully).* Nikolai Alexeyevich, Count!

LEBEDEV. Well, I never! It's the Count! *(Goes up to meet him.)*

SHABELSKY *(sees Zinaida and Babakina and stretches out his hands towards them).* Two money-boxes on one sofa! A curious sight! *(Greets Zinaida.)* Hello, Zyuzyushka! *(Then Babakina).* Hello, my little pompon!

ZINAIDA. I'm so pleased. You're such a rare visitor, Count! *(Calls out.)* Tea, Gavrila! Do sit down, please! *(Gets up and goes out of the door on the right, then returns straightaway looking very worried. Sasha sits down again in the same place. Ivanov bows silently to everyone.)*

LEBEDEV *(To Shabelsky).* Fancy seeing you! How did you get here? What a surprise! *(Kisses him.)* You're an old rascal, you know, Count! Respectable people don't behave like that! *(Takes his arm and leads him to the footlights.)* Why haven't you been to see us? Did something upset you?

SHABELSKY. How can I get here? On a broomstick? I don't have any horses of my own, and Nikolai won't take me with him. Tells me to stay with Sarah and keep her company. Send your horses for me and I'll come alright.

LEBEDEV *(waves a hand).* Not likely! Zyuzyushka would rather die than send horses. My dear old fellow, you're nearer and dearer to me than anyone else. Only you and I are left out of all those old buffers! "My former sufferings in you I love, my youth which I did spend in vain..." But joking apart, I'm on the verge of tears. *(Embraces the Count.)*

SHABELSKY. Let me go! You smell like a wine cellar.

LEBEDEV. My dear fellow, you can't imagine how dreary it is without my friends! I'm so fed up I could hang myself. *(Quietly.)* Zyuzyushka's driven all the decent people away with her money-lending. Only the Zulus are left now, as you can see, the Dudkins and Budkins. Here, have some tea.

Gavrila serves the Count some tea

ZINAIDA *(worriedly to Gavrila).* That's no way to serve tea. You should offer people some jam. Gooseberry, perhaps...

SHABELSKY *(laughing, to Ivanov).* I told you so, didn't I? *(To Lebedev.)* I bet him on the way here that as soon as we arrived Zyuzyushka would offer us some gooseberry jam.

ZINAIDA. You're such a joker, Count. *(Sits down.)*

LEBEDEV. Twenty barrels of it they made. What are we going to do with it?

SHABELSKY *(sitting down by the table).* So you've been saving up, have you, Zyuzyushka? Got a million yet, eh?

ZINAIDA *(with a sigh).* Yes, to other people it must seem as if there's no one richer than us, but where is our money? It's just a lot of talk.

SHABELSKY. Oh, yes, yes. Of course. We know how bad you are at playing draughts. *(To Lebedev.)* Tell me straight, Pasha, have you saved up a million?

LEBEDEV. I don't know. Ask Zyuzyushka.

SHABELSKY *(To Babakina).* And our plump little pompon will soon have a million too. She gets prettier and plumper all the time! That's what it means to be well off.

BABAKINA. Thanking you kindly, your Excellency, only I don't like people poking fun at me.

SHABELSKY. My dear money-box, who's poking fun? That was just a *cri de coeur* uttered from an excess of

feeling. You know I just adore you and Zyuzyushka. *(Gaily.)* Oh, joy! Oh, rapture! I can't look upon either of you indifferently.

ZINAIDA. You're just the same as you always were. *(To Yegorushka.)* Put out the candles, Yegorushka! Why waste them if you're not playing? *(Yegorushka starts, puts out the candles and sits down.) (To Ivanov.)* And how is your wife's health, may I ask?

IVANOV. Bad. Today the Doctor actually said she has consumption.

ZINAIDA. Really? What a pity! *(Sighs.)* We are all so fond of her.

SHABELSKY. Nonsense, nonsense and more nonsense! It's not consumption at all. The Doctor's a charlatan, a trickster. He wants to hang around her, so he's thought up consumption. It's a good thing she hasn't got a jealous husband.

Ivanov makes an impatient gesture

As for Sarah herself, I don't believe a single word or movement of hers. Never in my whole life have I trusted doctors, lawyers or women. It's nonsense, charlatanism, trickery!

LEBEDEV *(To Shabelsky).* You are a strange person, Matvei! You affect a kind of misanthropy and then make an awful song and dance about it. You're alright as a person, but you talk as if you've got poison on your tongue or catarrh.

SHABELSKY. What do you want me to do, give all the rascals and scoundrels a big hug?

LEBEDEV. Where are all these rascals and scoundrels?

SHABELSKY. Present company excepted, of course, but...

LEBEDEV. You and your buts. It's all affectation.

SHABELSKY. Affectation... It's a good thing you don't have a *Weltanschauung.*

LEBEDEV. What is my *Weltanschauung?* I just sit here waiting to kick the bucket. That's my *Weltanschauung.* At our age a person doesn't think of *Weltanschauungs,* old chap. Certainly not. *(Calls.)* Gavrila!

SHABELSKY. You've done enough gavriling. Your nose is the colour of sandalwood.

LEBEDEV *(drinks).* Never mind, old chap, I'm not going off to my wedding.

ZINAIDA. Doctor Lvov hasn't been to see us for such a long time. He's quite forgotten us.

SASHA. Can't stand him. Honesty incarnate. He can't ask for a glass of water or smoke a cigarette without showing off his extraordinary honesty. Whether he's walking or talking it's written on his forehead "I am an honest man!" Bores you to tears.

SHABELSKY. He's a blinkered, narrow-minded quack. *(Mimics him.)* "Make way for honest toil!" He squawks away like a parrot all the time and fancies himself as a second Dobrolyubov. Everyone who doesn't squawk is a scoundrel. His views are most profound. If a peasant's well-off and doing quite nicely, that means he's a rascal and a kulak. I wear a velvet jacket and am dressed by my valet, so I'm a rogue and a bloodsucker. He's so honest that he's absolutely bursting with it. Always fretting about something. I'm afraid of him. Truly I am. His sense of duty could make him punch you in the nose or call you a scoundrel.

IVANOV. He's really worn me out, but I like him all the same. He's very sincere.

SHABELSKY. He's sincere alright! Yesterday evening he came up to me and said out of the blue: "I find you most disagreeable, Count!" Thank you very much! And it's all straight from the heart: the voice shakes, the eyes flash, and the veins throb. The devil take his wooden sincerity.

He finds me revolting, base, that's only natural ... I don't deny it, but why say it to my face? I know I'm pretty rotten, but I do have grey hair... Dull, heartless honesty.

LEBEDEV. Well, well, well. You were young yourself once, so you should understand.

SHABELSKY. Yes, I was young and stupid once. I acted Chatsky, denouncing rogues and scoundrels, but I never called a thief a thief to his face and never talked about the noose in the house of a hanged man. I was well-mannered. But that stupid doctor of yours would feel on top of the world, in his seventh heaven, if fate gave him the chance to punch me in the nose or under the belt in public for the sake of principles and noble ideals.

LEBEDEV. Young people are always hot-headed. My uncle was an Hegelian. He used to fill the house with guests, have a bit to drink, then stand on a chair and let fly at them: "You are all ignoramuses, the power of darkness! A new life is dawning!" And so on and so forth. You should have heard him ranting and raving.

SASHA. What about the guests?

LEBEDEV. Oh, they didn't mind. Just went on drinking. Actually I once challenged him to a duel, my own uncle. All because of Bacon. I remember sitting there, like Matvei, while my uncle and the late Gerasim Nilych were standing just about where Nikolai is. Yes, then Gerasim Nilych asked this question, old chap...

V

Borkin enters through the door on the right, dressed like a dandy, carrying a parcel, skipping and singing. Loud shouts of approval

YOUNG LADIES. Mikhail Mikhailovich!

LEBEDEV. Michel Michelich! Well, I never...

SHABELSKY. The life and soul of the party!

BORKIN. Here I am, everybody! *(Runs up to Sasha.)*

Noble signorina, I make so bold as to congratulate the universe on the birthday of such a delicate flower as you. As a tribute to my rapture, I venture to offer you *(hands her the parcel)* these fireworks and Bengal lights of my own manufacture. May they light up the night just as you light up the realm of darkness. *(Makes a theatrical bow.)*

SASHA. Thank you.

LEBEDEV *(laughing, to Ivanov).* Why don't you get rid of that Judas?

BORKIN *(to Lebedev).* Sir! *(To Ivanov.)* Patron. *(Sings.) Nicholas-voilà,* ho-he-ho! *(Walks round everyone.)* Most esteemed Mrs Lebedev. Divine Martha Babakina. Most venerable Avdotia Nazarovna. Your Excellency...

SHABELSKY *(laughs).* The life and soul of the party. As soon as he walked in the atmosphere brightened up. Did you notice?

BORKIN. Phew, I'm worn out. Think I've greeted everyone. Well, what's new, ladies and gents? Anything to really take your breath away? *(Quickly to Zinaida.)* Listen to this, Mother. I was driving over here... *(To Gavrila.)* Bring us some tea, Gavrila, only no gooseberry jam! *(To Zinaida.)* I was driving over here, when I saw some peasants stripping the bark off the willow trees by the river. Why don't you rent the willow out?

LEBEDEV *(to Ivanov).* Why don't you get rid of that Judas?

ZINAIDA *(alarmed).* You're right, I hadn't thought of it!

BORKIN *(doing some hand exercises).* Can't do without exercise. What tricks shall I show you, Mother? I'm in fine form, Martha. In a state of inspiration! *(Sings).* "Here I stand once more before thee..."

ZINAIDA. Do something, for goodness sake. Everyone's bored stiff.

BORKIN. Why are you all so down in the dumps, ladies and gents? Sitting there like a pack of jurymen! Let's

think of something to do. What would you like? Forfeits, skipping, a game of catch, dancing or fireworks?

YOUNG LADIES *(clapping).* Fireworks! Fireworks! *(They run into the garden.)*

SASHA *(To Ivanov).* Why are you so depressed today?

IVANOV. I've got a head-ache, Sasha. And it's so tedious.

SASHA. Let's go into the drawing room.

They go through the door on the right. The rest go into the garden, except for Zinaida and Lebedev

ZINAIDA. Now that's what I like. A young man like him. Cheers everyone up as soon as he arrives. *(Turns down the big lamp.)* No point in wasting the candles while they're all in the garden. *(Puts out the candles.)*

LEBEDEV *(following her around).* We should give the guests something to eat, Zyuzyushka.

ZINAIDA. So many candles. No wonder people think we're rich. *(Puts some more out.)*

LEBEDEV *(following her around).* You might give them something to eat, Zyuzyushka. They're young, they must be ravenous by now, poor things. Zyuzyushka...

ZINAIDA. The Count didn't finish his tea. What a waste of sugar. *(Goes through the door on the left.)*

LEBEDEV. You and your sugar! *(Goes into the garden.)*

VI

Ivanov and Sasha

SASHA *(enters with Ivanov through the door on the right).* They've all gone into the garden.

IVANOV. So there you are, Sasha. I used to work a lot and think a lot, but never get tired. Now I do nothing and think about nothing, but my body and soul are exhausted.

Day and night my conscience torments me. I feel very guilty, but precisely what of I do not know. Then there's my wife's illness, my lack of money, the constant bickering, gossip, futile conversations, and that fool Borkin. My house has become hateful to me, and living in it is worse than torture. I tell you straight, Sasha, I find even the company of my wife, who loves me, intolerable. You're an old friend, so you won't be angry with me for being so frank. I came here to enjoy myself, but I'm depressed here too and I want to go home. Forgive me, I'll just slip off quietly.

SASHA. I understand. You're unhappy because you are lonely. You need someone by your side whom you love and who understands you. Only love can revive you.

IVANOV. Come now, Sasha. That would be the last straw if a bedraggled old rooster like me started a new affair! May the good Lord protect me from such a disaster! No, my dear, that's not the answer. I tell you, honest to God, I could put up with everything, boredom, psychopathy, financial ruin, losing my wife, getting old too soon and being so lonely, but what I can't put up with, simply can't endure, is my mockery of myself. I am dying with shame at the thought that I, a strong, healthy man, have turned into a cross between Hamlet, Manfred and a superfluous man ... the devil only knows what! Some wretched people would find it flattering to be called a Hamlet or a superfluous man, but for me it's a disgrace! It wounds my pride, I'm overwhelmed with shame, and I suffer.

SASHA *(jokingly, through tears).* Let's run away to America, Nikolai.

IVANOV. I can hardly make myself walk to the door, and you talk about going to America.

They walk over to the door into the garden.

It really is difficult for you here, Sasha. When I look at

the people round you, I wonder who on earth you could marry. Our only hope is that some passing lieutenant or student will carry you away...

VII

Zinaida comes through the door on the left with a jar of jam

IVANOV. Excuse me, Sasha, I'll catch you up.

Sasha goes into the garden

I have a request to make, Mrs Lebedev.

ZINAIDA. What is it, Mr Ivanov?

IVANOV. *(embarrassed).* Well, actually your interest is due the day after tomorrow. You would be doing me a great favour, if you could give me a little longer or let me add the interest to the capital. I have no money at all at the moment...

ZINAIDA *(alarmed).* How could I possibly do that? Fancy suggesting such a thing! No, and for goodness sake don't upset me like that again, poor soul that I am.

IVANOV. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. *(Goes into the garden.)*

ZINAIDA. Phew, gracious me, he gave me quite a turn! I've got the shakes. I really have. *(Exit through door on right).*

VIII

KOSYKH *(enters through door on left and crosses the stage).* I had the ace, king, queen and eight of diamonds, the ace of spades and one ... one tiny heart, and she couldn't bid a little slam, the devil take her! *(Exit through door on right).*

IX

Avdotia Nazarovna and First Guest

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(coming out of the garden with the First Guest).* I'd tear her to pieces, the stingy old cow ... tear her to pieces, I would! I've been here since five o'clock, and she hasn't even offered me a bit of mouldy herring! What a house! What hospitality!

FIRST GUEST. And it's so boring, you want to go berserk and bang your head against a wall! What people, merciful Heavens! You get so ravenous that you could howl like a wolf and turn cannibal.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. I'd like to tear her to pieces, God help me!

FIRST GUEST. I must have a drink, old lady, then I'll be off home. Don't try to find me a wife here. Not a drop since lunch-time. This is no place to go courting.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Let's have a look for something, shall we?

FIRST GUEST. Shush! Quietly does it! I think there's a bottle of brandy in the dining room sideboard. We'll put the screws on Yegorushka. Shush!

They go out through the door on the left

X

Anna and Lvov *(enter through door on right)*

ANNA. Don't worry, they'll be pleased to see us. There's no one here. They must be in the garden.

LVOV. Why on earth did you drag me here, to these vultures? It's no place for you and me. Honest people should keep away from such an atmosphere!

ANNA. Now listen here, Mr Honest Man! It's not nice to take a lady somewhere and tell her all the way what an

honest person you are. It may be honest, but it's also very boring. Never talk to women about your virtues. Let them find out for themselves. When he was young like you, my Nikolai only sang songs and told funny stories in the company of women, but they all knew what sort of person he was.

LVOV. Bah, don't talk to me about your Nikolai. I can see right through him.

ANNA. You're a good person, but you don't see anything. Let's go into the garden. He never said: "I'm honest! This atmosphere stifles me! Vultures! An owls' nest! Crocodiles!" He left the menagerie in peace, and when he got upset all I ever heard from him was "I was so unfair today!" or "Anna, I feel so sorry for that person!" See, but you...

They go out

XI

Avdotia Nazarovna and First Guest

FIRST GUEST *(entering through door on left).* There's nothing in the dining room. Let's try the pantry. We must twist Yegorushka's arm. Let's go through the drawing room.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. I'd like to tear her to pieces!

They go out through the door on the right

XII

Babakina, Borkin and Shabelsky. (Babakina and Borkin run out of the garden laughing, followed by Shabelsky, mincing, laughing and rubbing his hands)

BABAKINA. It's so boring! *(Laughs.)* So boring! They all look bored stiff! It makes your bones ache. *(Hops up and down).* Need to shake them up a bit!

Borkin puts his arm round her waist and kisses her cheek

SHABELSKY *(guffaws and snaps his fingers.)* Well, I'll be damned! *(Hems loudly.)* How about a...

BABAKINA. Take your hands off me, you shameless creature. Goodness knows what the Count will think! Leave me alone!

BORKIN. Angel of my soul, carbuncle of my heart! *(Kisses her.)* I need a loan—two thousand three hundred roubles.

BABAKINA. O-oh no-o. Anything you like, but not when it comes to money—thanking you kindly. Not on your life! Now, take your hands off me!

SHABELSKY *(mincing beside them).* Little pompon. Has a certain something...

BORKIN *(seriously).* That's enough of that. Let's get down to business. Down to brass tacks, as they say. Tell me straight, without any humming-and-hawing and without any tricks: yes or no? Listen! *(Points at the Count.)* He needs money, at least three thousand a year. You need a husband. How would you like to be a countess?

SHABELSKY *(guffawing).* What a cynic!

BORKIN. How would you like to be a countess? Yes or no?

BABAKINA *(breathlessly).* What an idea! And that's not the way things are done. Hey presto! If the Count wanted to, he could ask me himself and ... and it's all so sudden...

BORKIN. No shilly-shallying. This is a business deal. Yes or no?

SHABELSKY *(laughing and rubbing his hands).* Perhaps I will, eh? Dammit, maybe I will stoop to such a thing? Eh? My little pompon. *(Kisses Babakina on the cheek.)* My poppet! My crunchy little cucumber!

BABAKINA. Stop, stop, you've set me all a flutter. Go away, go away! No, don't go!

BORKIN. Hurry up! Yes or no? We haven't got much time.

BABAKINA. I tell you what, Count. You come and visit me for two or three days. It's lively at my place, not like here. Come tomorrow. *(To Borkin.)* It's not a joke, is it?

BORKIN *(angrily).* Who'd joke about serious things like that?

BABAKINA. Wait a minute, wait a minute. Oh, I feel dizzy. All dizzy. A countess. I feel dizzy. I'm going to faint.

Borkin and the Count take her by the arm, laughing, kiss her on the cheek and lead her away through the door on the right

XIII

Ivanov, Sasha, then Anna. (Ivanov and Sasha run in from the garden.)

IVANOV *(clutching his head in despair).* It can't be true! You mustn't! You mustn't, Sasha! Oh, you mustn't.

SASHA *(with abandon).* I love you madly. Without you my life has no meaning, no happiness, no joy! You are everything to me.

IVANOV. But why? Why? Dear God, I don't understand. You mustn't, Sasha!

SASHA. When I was a child, you were my only joy. I loved you and your soul like myself, and now ... I love you, Nikolai. I'll go anywhere you say, to the ends of the earth, even to the grave, only please let's go quickly or I'll suffocate to death.

IVANOV *(breaks into a happy laugh).* What does it mean? The start of a new life? Is that right, Sasha? My happiness! *(Draws her to him.)* My youth, my freshness...

Anna comes out of the garden, sees her husband with Sasha, and stands stock-still

A new life? Can it be? Can I get down to work again?

They kiss. After the kiss Ivanov and Sasha look round and see Anna

(Horrified). Sarah!

Curtain

ACT THREE

Ivanov's study. His desk is piled with papers, books, official packets, odds and ends, and revolvers. By the papers is a lamp, a carafe of vodka, a plate of herring, bread and cucumbers. On the walls are survey maps, pictures, pistols, sickles, whips etc. It is midday

I

Shabelsky, Lebedev, Borkin and Pyotr.

Shabelsky and Lebedev are sitting on either side of the desk. Borkin is astride a chair back to front in the middle of the stage. Pyotr is standing by the door

LEBEDEV. France's policy is clear and precise. The French know what they want. They want to take a pot-shot at the sausage-makers and nothing else. But Germany's a different kettle of fish. France isn't the only mote in Germany's eye.

SHABELSKY. Rubbish! The French are cowards and so are the Germans, that's what I think. They'll just pull faces behind each other's backs. It won't get any further than face-pulling, believe me. They'll never fight.

BORKIN. And why should they fight, I ask you? What's the use of all these arms, congresses and expenses? Know what I'd do? I'd round up all the dogs in the country, inject them with a good dose of that pasteur

poison and send them over to the enemy. They'd all be raving mad in a month.

LEBEDEV *(laughing).* Your head's small enough, but it's full of brainwaves!

SHABELSKY. A genius!

LEBEDEV. You're a real wag, Michel Michelich, bless you! *(Stops laughing.)* Now then, gentlemen, that's all very well, but we've forgotten about the vodka. *Repetatur! (Pours out three glasses.)* Your very good health.

They drink and follow it down with a snack

Herring's the best thing to eat after vodka.

SHABELSKY. Oh, no, cucumber's better. Wise men have been pondering since the world began, but they still haven't thought of anything better than salted cucumber. *(To Pyotr).* Go and get some cucumbers, Pyotr, and tell them in the kitchen to fry four patties with onions. They must be piping hot.

Exit Pyotr

LEBEDEV. Vodka's good with caviare as well. Only it must be served properly. You take a quarter of a pound of pressed caviare, two spring onions and some Provence butter, mix it all up, see, and squeeze some lemon on top. Delicious! The smell alone's enough to drive you crazy.

BORKIN. Vodka's good followed by fried gudgeon. Only it must be well fried. You clean the fish, then dip it in roasted breadcrumbs and fry it dry, so that it crunches in your mouth. Crunch-crunch.

SHABELSKY. You should have tasted those mushrooms at Babakina's yesterday.

LEBEDEV. I bet.

SHABELSKY. They were cooked in a special way, you know, with onions, bay leaf and all sorts of spices. When they took the lid off the saucepan, the smell was out of this world!

LEBEDEV. How about it? *Repetatur,* gentlemen!

They drink

Your very good health. *(Looks at his watch.)* Can't wait for Nikolai. I must be going. Served mushrooms at Babakina's, did they? We haven't had mushrooms yet. But tell me, what were you doing at Martha's?

SHABELSKY *(nodding at Borkin).* He wants to marry me off to her.

LEBEDEV. Marry you off? How old are you?

SHABELSKY. Sixty-two.

LEBEDEV. Just the age for getting married. And Martha's just the person for you.

BORKIN. It's not Martha he wants, it's her sterling.

LEBEDEV. So that's what he's after—Martha's sterling. Perhaps you'd like some goose-tea as well, eh?

BORKIN. Well, just wait till he marries her and fills his pockets, you'll have goose-tea alright. And be green with envy.

SHABELSKY. He's serious, you know. This genius is quite sure I'll do what he says and get married.

BORKIN. What's the matter? Aren't you sure too?

SHABELSKY. You must be crazy. When was I sure? Pah!

BORKIN. Well, thank you. Thank you very much! So you're just having me on, eh? One minute you're going to marry her, the next you're not, dammit. And I've already given my word of honor! Are you going to or are you not?

SHABELSKY *(shrugs his shoulders).* He's serious, you know. Incredible fellow!

BORKIN *(losing his temper).* In that case why upset an honest woman? She's set her heart on being a countess. Can't sleep or eat for the thought of it. What a thing to joke about? Call that being honest?

SHABELSKY *(snapping his fingers).* Maybe I will do

this base deed, eh? Why not? Just for spite! I'll do it, honest, I will. That'll be a laugh!

Enter Lvov

II

LEBEDEV. Our most humble regards to Mr Aesculapius. *(Offers Lvov his hand and sings).* "Save, oh, save me, doctor dear, I'm scared to death of death."

LVOV. Isn't Ivanov back yet?

LEBEDEV. No, I've been waiting for him myself for over an hour.

Lvov paces impatiently round the stage

Tell us, my good fellow, how is Anna?

LVOV. Very poorly.

LEBEDEV *(sighs).* May I go and pay my respects?

LVOV. Please don't. I think she's asleep...

Pause

LEBEDEV. Such a nice, fine woman... *(Sighs).* When she fainted at our place on Sasha's birthday, I looked at her face and realised then that she hadn't long to live, poor thing. I don't know why she suddenly collapsed. I ran in and saw her lying there on the floor, white as a sheet. Nikolai was kneeling beside her, very pale too, and Sasha was in tears. After that Sasha and I wandered around in a daze for a week.

SHABELSKY *(to Lvov).* Tell me, revered high priest of science, who first discovered that ladies with chest diseases need frequent visits from a young doctor? It's a great discovery! A great discovery! Where does it belong: to allopathy or homeopathy?

Lvov is about to reply, but makes a contemptuous gesture and goes off

What a devastating look!

LEBEDEV. You can't resist the temptation to needle him, can you? Why go and insult him like that?

SHABELSKY *(irritatedly).* Why is he lying? Consumption, no hope, she's going to die. He's lying! I can't stand that!

LEBEDEV. What makes you think he's lying?

SHABELSKY *(stands up and walks about).* I can't accept the idea that a person can suddenly die, just like that. Let's change the subject!

III

KOSYKH *(runs in panting).* Is Mr Ivanov at home? Good-day to you! *(Shakes hands with everyone quickly.)* Is he?

BORKIN. No, he's not here.

KOSYKH *(sits down, then jumps up).* In that case, I bid you farewell! *(Drinks a glass of vodka and has a quick bite to eat.)* I must be on my way. So much to do. I'm worn out. Can hardly stand up.

LEBEDEV. Where do you hail from?

KOSYKH. From Barabanov's. Played bridge all night, only just stopped. Lost everything I had. That Barabanov's hopeless at cards. *(Plaintively.)* Just imagine. I was playing hearts all the time. *(Turns to Borkin who jumps away from him.)* He puts down a diamond, I play another heart, he plays a diamond... And so it goes on. I was one trick short. *(To Lebedev.)* Then we play four clubs. I had the ace, queen and five more clubs, the ace and the ten of spades...

LEBEDEV *(putting his hands over his ears).* That's enough, for goodness sake, that's enough!

KOSYKH *(to the Count).* See? The ace and the queen of clubs, the ace and the ten of spades...

SHABELSKY *(pushes him away).* Go away, I don't want to hear it.

KOSYKH. And then suddenly disaster: my ace of spades was trumped...

SHABELSKY *(grabs the revolver on the table).* Go away, or I'll shoot!

KOSYKH *(waves his hand).* Dammit. Isn't there anyone to talk to? It's like being in Australia: no common interests, no solidarity. Everyone living apart. Still, I must be going. It's high time. *(Grabs his cap.)* Time is precious. *(Offers his hand to Lebedev.)* I pass!

Laughter

Kosykh goes out, bumping into Avdotia Nazarovna in the doorway

IV

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(exclaims).* Look where you're going, stupid. You nearly knocked me over!

ALL. Aah. Avdotia Nazarovna is everywhere.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Here they are. I've been searching the whole house for them. Hello, my brave falcons, and welcome to you.

LEBEDEV. What brings you here?

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. Business, sir! *(To the Count.)* A matter concerning Your Excellency. *(Bows.)* I have been requested to bring you greetings and enquire about your health. And she, my little doll, asked me to say that if you don't come by this evening, she will cry her pretty eyes out. "Take him to one side, my dear," she said, "and whisper it secretly into his ear." But why should it be a secret? We're all friends here. And it's all right and proper, a matter of mutual agreement, not a case of chicken stealing. I never drink, sinner that I am, but I'll make an exception for an occasion like this!

LEBEDEV. And so will I. *(Pours out the glasses).* So you're still going strong, you old bird-house. I've known you as an old woman for nigh on thirty years.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA. I've lost count of the years. I've buried two husbands and would gladly take a third, but no one wants a wife without a dowry. Had eight children altogether. *(Takes a glass.)* Well, here goes. We've started a good thing. God grant that we may finish it. They'll live happily ever after, and we'll enjoy watching them. Here's wishing them health and happiness. *(Drinks.)* Tough vodka!

SHABELSKY *(guffaws, to Lebedev).* You know, the most extraordinary thing about it is that they are quite serious, as if I ... Incredible! *(Stands up.)* Or what do you think, Pasha, maybe I really will do this terrible thing to myself? Just for spite. Like, here you are, old dog, eat that! Eh, Pasha?

LEBEDEV. You're talking nonsense, Count. You and I should be thinking about kicking the bucket, my friend. The time for Martha and her sterling is way behind us. We've had our day.

SHABELSKY. Yes, I will do it. Honest to goodness, I will.

Enter Ivanov and Lvov

V

LVOV. Please grant me just five minutes.

LEBEDEV. Nikolai! *(Goes up to Ivanov and kisses him.)* Hello, dear friend. I've been waiting ages for you.

AVDOTIA NAZAROVNA *(bowing).* Good-day, sir.

IVANOV *(ruefully).* You've turned my study into a tavern again, gentlemen! I've asked each and everyone of you a thousand times not to do that. *(Goes up to the desk.)* Look at this, papers soiled with vodka, crumbs, bits of cucumber. It's disgusting!

LEBEDEV. Sorry, Nikolai, sorry. Forgive me. I must have a talk to you, old chap, about a very important matter.

BORKIN. So must I.

LVOV. May I have a word with you?

IVANOV *(pointing to Lebedev).* He wants to speak to me too. Wait a moment. *(To Lebedev.)* What is it?

LEBEDEV. I should like to speak confidentially. If you don't mind...

The Count goes out with Avdotia Nazarovna, followed by Borkin, then Lvov

IVANOV. You can drink as much as you like, Pasha, that's your problem, but please don't encourage my uncle to. He never used to drink. It's bad for him.

LEBEDEV *(taken aback).* I didn't realise, old chap. I hadn't even noticed.

IVANOV. If the old baby were to die, God forbid, I'd be the one to suffer, not you. What is it you want?

Pause

LEBEDEV. Well, you see, old fellow... I don't know how to start without sounding rude. Nikolai, I feel awful, I'm blushing and tongue-tied, but put yourself in my place, old chap, remember I'm a dependent, a slave, a rag... Forgive me, please.

IVANOV. What's the matter?

LEBEDEV. The wife sent me. Do me a favour, be a friend and pay her the interest! She's pestered me, nagged me, tormented me to death! Get free of her, for God's sake!

IVANOV. You know I haven't any money at the moment, Pasha.

LEBEDEV. Yes, I know, but what am I to do? She won't wait. Sasha and I won't be able to look you in the eye, if she takes you to court.

IVANOV. I feel very bad about it myself, Pasha, and I'd move heaven and earth, but ... where can I get it from?

Tell me, where? The only thing is to wait until I sell the grain harvest in autumn.

LEBEDEV *(shouts).* But she refuses to wait!

Pause

IVANOV. You're in a most unpleasant, ticklish position, but mine is even worse. *(Walks around, racking his brains.)* I can't think of anything. I've nothing to sell.

LEBEDEV. Why don't you go and ask Milbakh. He does owe you sixteen thousand.

Ivanov waves a hand hopelessly

I tell you what, Nikolai. I know this will make you angry, but... Do me a favour, old soak that I am! For old time's sake. Look on me as a friend. You and I are students, liberals. Got the same ideas and interests. Both studied at Moscow University. Our *Alma Mater. (Takes our his wallet.)* I've kept this secret, not a soul at home knows about it. You can borrow it. *(Takes out the money and puts it on the desk.)* Forget about your pride, but just look on me as a friend. I'd take it from you, honest I would.

Pause

Here it is on the desk: about one thousand one hundred. Give it to her yourself today. "Here you are, Madam, go and get stuffed!" Only be sure not to say that you got it from me, God help us! Or I'll get gooseberry jam all over me! *(Looks Ivanov in the eye.)* Oh, alright, don't! *(Picks the money up quickly and puts it back in his pocket.)* Don't then. I was just joking. Forgive me, for Christ's sake.

Pause.

Are you sick to death of everything?

Ivanov waves a hand

Yes, I know. *(Sighs.)* It's a time of grief and sorrow for you. A man's like a samovar, old chap. He doesn't always stand on a cool shelf. Sometimes they put burning charcoal in him and pshh ... pshh! Not much of a comparison, I know, but you won't find a better one. *(Sighs.)* Unhappiness strengthens the soul. I don't pity you, Nikolai. I know you'll survive. It'll all come right in the end, but I feel disgusted, old boy, and angry with people. Where do all these rumours come from? There are so many rumours about you all over the district, you might get a visit from the Procurator. You're a murderer, a bloodsucker, a robber...

IVANOV. That's all nonsense. My head aches.

LEBEDEV. It's because you think too much.

IVANOV. I don't think at all.

LEBEDEV. Why don't you forget about all this and come to our place, Nikolai. Sasha loves you, understands you and appreciates you. She's a fine, honest girl, Nikolai. Not like her mother or her dad, must take after some passing lad. When I look at her, I can hardly believe a fat-nosed soak like me could have produced such a treasure. Come and have a bit of clever talk with her. It'll take your mind off things. She is a loyal, sincere person.

Pause

IVANOV. Leave me alone, Pasha.

LEBEDEV. I understand, I understand. *(Looks hurriedly at his watch.)* I understand. *(Kisses Ivanov.)* Goodbye. I've got to attend a school foundation ceremony. *(Walks towards the door and stops.)* Clever girl. Yesterday Sasha and I were talking about the rumours. *(Laughs.)* She put it like this: "Glow-worms shine at night so that night birds can see them and eat them up, and good people provide food for slander and gossip." How about that? Brilliant, eh? George Sand.

IVANOV. Pasha! *(Stops him.)* What's the matter with me?

LEBEDEV. I wanted to ask you the same thing myself, but I didn't dare. I don't know, old boy! On the one hand, you're weighed down by all sorts of worries, but on the other, I know you're not the sort of person to... You never let troubles get the better of you. It must be something else, Nikolai, but I don't know what!

IVANOV. I don't know myself. I think perhaps ... no, that's not it!

Pause

This is what I was going to say. I used to have a workman called Semyon. You remember him. One day at threshing time, he heaved two sacks of rye onto his back to show the lassies how strong he was and cracked under the strain. He died shortly afterwards. I think I've cracked up too. High school, university, then running the estate, schools, projects. I believed differently from other people, married differently, got carried away, took risks, squandered my money right and left, you know it, was happy and suffered differently from anyone else in the district. They were all my sacks, Pasha. I've put a load on my back, and my back has broken. At twenty we're all heroes, ready, able to take on everything, and by thirty we're already exhausted and not fit for anything. How do you explain that exhaustion, tell me? But perhaps that's not the reason. It's wrong, all wrong. You'd better be going, Pasha, I'm boring you.

LEBEDEV *(animatedly).* You know what? It's your surroundings that have got you down!

IVANOV. That's stupid, Pasha, and banal. Off you go!

LEBEDEV. Yes, it is stupid. I can see now that it's stupid. I'm off! *(Goes out.)*

VI

IVANOV *(alone).* I'm a foul, pitiful, worthless creature. Only another pitiful, jaded, haggard creature like Pasha could love and respect me. Dear God, how I despise myself! How I hate my voice, my footsteps, my hands, these clothes, my thoughts. It's ridiculous, humiliating! Only a year ago I was strong and healthy, cheerful, tireless and keen. I worked with these hands, I moved even blockheads to tears with my speeches, and I could weep at misfortune and fight against evil. I knew inspiration, knew the delight and poetry of quiet nights when you sit at your desk from dusk to dawn or console your mind with sweet dreams. I believed, I looked at the future as into my mother's eyes. But now, dear God! I'm worn out, believe in nothing, idle away my days and nights. My brain, my hands, my feet refuse to obey me. My estate is going to rack and ruin, my forests are crashing under the axe. *(Weeps.)* My land looks at me like an orphan. I expect nothing, pity nothing, my heart quakes with fear of the morrow. And what about Sarah? I swore to love her forever, promised we would be happy, showed her a future she had never even dreamed of. And she believed me. Over these five years I have watched her slowly fade away under the burden of her sacrifices, watched her strength drain in the battle with her conscience, but never has she given me a doubting glance or a word of reproach! So what? I have stopped loving her. Why? What for? I cannot say. She's suffering, her days are numbered, yet I, wretched coward, flee her pale face, sunken chest and imploring eyes. It's shameful! Shameful!

Pause

A young girl, Sasha, is moved by my troubles. She declares her love for me, almost an old man, and I get intoxicated, forget about everything else, entranced as if by

music, and shout: "A new life! Happiness!" And the next day I believe as little in this new life and happiness as in house goblins. What's the matter with me? What abyss awaits me? Why this weakness? What's happened to my nerves? The slightest thing, my sick wife saying something that hurts my pride, a servant doing something wrong or my gun misfiring, makes me rude, angry and quite unlike myself.

Pause

I can't understand it. It's enough to make you put a bullet through your brain!

LVOV *(comes in).* I must speak my mind to you, sir.

IVANOV. If we're going to do that each day, Doctor, we won't be able to stand it.

LVOV. Will you kindly listen to me?

IVANOV. I listen to you each day and still don't know what you want of me.

LVOV. I speak clearly and precisely. Only someone without a heart could fail to understand me.

IVANOV. That my wife is dying—I know. That I am hopelessly to blame with respect to her—I also know. That you are a straightforward, honest man—I know too! What more do you want?

LVOV. I am revolted by human cruelty. A woman is dying. She has a father and mother whom she loves and would like to see before she dies. They know perfectly well she will die soon and still loves them but, devilishly cruel though it is, they want to parade their religious ardour, it seems, by continuing to curse her! You are the man for whom she sacrificed all, her parental home and peace of mind, yet you go off each day to the Lebedevs in the most shameless fashion and for the most shameless purpose!

IVANOV. I haven't been there for a fortnight...

LVOV *(not listening to him).* People like you require plain speaking, no beating about the bush. If you don't

want to listen to me, then don't! I'm used to calling a spade a spade. You need this death for further conquests. Alright, but surely you could wait a bit? If you were to let her die naturally and not hurry it up by your blatant cynicism, you still wouldn't lose Lebedev's girl and her dowry. If not now, then in a year or two, you'd manage to turn the head of that young girl and get hold of her dowry, you wonderful Tartuffe. Why be in such a hurry? Why must your wife die now, and not in a month's time or a year?

IVANOV. What torment. You can't be a very good physician, Doctor, if you think a man can restrain himself forever. It's costing me a terrible effort not to reply to your insults.

LVOV. Who do you think you're fooling? Take off your mask.

IVANOV. Wait a moment, Mister know-all. You think you can see right through me, don't you? I married Anna to get a big dowry. But I miscalculated and didn't receive one, so now I'm trying to get rid of her in order to marry someone else and get her dowry. Is that it? How simple and uncomplicated. Man is such a simple machine... No, Doctor, we all have too many cogs, screws and valves inside us to judge one another on first impressions or outward appearances. I don't understand you, you don't understand me, and neither of us understands himself. You can be an excellent doctor, and still not know people at all. Don't be so self-assured. Agree with what I've said.

LVOV. Surely you don't think you are so hard to understand and I am so stupid that I can't tell the difference between deceit and honesty?

IVANOV. You and I will obviously never understand each other. I ask you for the last time, and please answer me straight: what exactly do you want from me? What are you after? *(Irritatedly.)* And with whom do I have the honour of speaking: my wife's doctor or my own prosecutor?

LVOV. I'm a doctor and, as a doctor, I demand that you change your behaviour. It is killing your wife!

IVANOV. But what can I do? What? If you understand me better than I understand myself, tell me definitely: what must I do?

LVOV. At least don't act so blatantly.

IVANOV. Oh, my God! Are you sure you understand yourself? *(Takes a drink of water.)* Leave me alone. I'm to blame a thousand times and I shall answer for it before God, but no one has authorised you to torture me each day.

LVOV. And who has authorised you to insult the truth in me? You have racked and poisoned my soul. Before I came to this district, I knew there were stupid, mad, obsessed people, but I never thought there were deliberate criminals, people who consciously directed their will towards evil. I loved and respected people, until I met you.

IVANOV. I've already heard all that!

LVOV. Have you? *(Sees Sasha coming in. She is wearing a riding-habit.)* Now I trust we understand each other! *(Shrugs his shoulders and goes out.)*

VII

IVANOV *(startled).* Sasha, is that you?

SASHA. Yes. Hello. Are you surprised? Why haven't you been to see us for so long?

IVANOV. Sasha, for goodness sake, you shouldn't have come. It might have an awful effect on my wife.

SASHA. She won't see me. I came through the back way. I won't stay long. I got worried. Are you alright? Why didn't you come for such a long time?

IVANOV. My wife is upset enough as it is, almost dying, and you have to come here. Sasha, Sasha, it was thoughtless and callous of you!

SASHA. What else could I have done? You haven't been to see us for a fortnight or answered my letters. I couldn't bear it. I kept thinking you might be suffering dreadfully here, ill, even dead. I couldn't sleep at night. I won't stay long. Just tell me: are you alright?

IVANOV. No, I'm worn out, people keep tormenting me. I'm at the end of my tether. And now you have to come! It's so unhealthy, so abnormal! I'm so guilty, Sasha, so guilty!

SASHA. You love saying ghastly, heart-breaking things! So you're guilty, are you? Really guilty? Then tell me: guilty of what?

IVANOV. I don't know, I don't know.

SASHA. That's no answer. Every sinner should know how he has sinned. Perhaps you've forged banknotes, have you?

IVANOV. Not funny.

SASHA. Or are you guilty of not loving your wife any more? Perhaps, but a man is not the master of his feelings. You didn't want to stop loving her. Are you guilty because she saw me saying I love you? No, you didn't want her to see...

IVANOV *(interrupting her).* And so on and so forth. Fell in love, fell out of love, can't help my feelings—all these banal, hackneyed phrases are no help at all.

SASHA. Talking to you is exhausting. *(Looks at a picture.)* That dog's very well drawn. Was it from life?

IVANOV. Yes, it was. And this affair of ours is banal too. He gets depressed and gives up. Then SHE appears, hale and hearty, and puts him back on his feet. It's all very nice and convincing in novels, but in real life...

SASHA. And in real life too.

IVANOV. So that's how well you understand life! My moaning inspires you with awe, you think you've found a second Hamlet in me, but to my mind this psychopathic behaviour of mine with all that it entails is only good for a

laugh and nothing else! You should laugh yourself silly at my posturing, yet you rush to the rescue instead. Save him, perform a noble act. Bah, I'm so angry with myself today. I have the feeling all my tension will come to a head today. Either I'll smash something, or...

SASHA. That's just what you should do. Smash something, break it to smithereens or shout. You're angry with me. It was silly to come here. Alright then, lose your temper, shout at me, stamp your feet. Go on. Lose your temper.

Pause

Go on.

IVANOV. Funny girl.

SASHA. Splendid. We're actually smiling! Be so kind as to smile once again, sir!

IVANOV *(laughing).* When you start trying to save me and teach me some sense, your face gets terribly naive and your pupils go terribly round as if you're watching a comet. Wait, there's some dust on your shoulder. *(Brushes some dust off her.)* A naive man is a fool. But when you, women, are naive you manage to look sweet, nice, warm, and not at all stupid. But why do you all have the same weakness? As long as a man is healthy, strong and cheerful, you pay no attention to him at all, but as soon as he begins to go downhill and bemoan his fate, you start hanging round his neck. Is it really worse to be the wife of a strong, brave man than the sicknurse of a snivelling failure?

SASHA. Yes, it is!

IVANOV. Why? *(Guffaws.)* Darwin didn't know about that, or he would have ticked you off. You are spoiling the human race. Thanks to your noble efforts all newborn babes will be grousers and psychopaths soon.

SASHA. There are lots of things men don't understand. Any girl prefers a man who's a failure to one who's a success, because we find the idea of active love inspiring.

See? Active love. Men are always busy, so for them love takes third place. Talk to the wife, walk with her in the garden, have a nice time, then weep a few tears on her grave. And that's it. But for us love is life itself. I love you means I long to cure you of your melancholy, to go to the end of the world with you. You climb a mountain, I climb it too. You plunge into a pit, I plunge into it too. It would make me so happy to spend all night just copying out your papers, making sure that no one woke you up, or walking a hundred miles with you. I remember three years ago at threshing time you came to us covered with dust, sun-tanned and exhausted and asked for a drink. When I brought you the glass, you were fast asleep on the divan. You slept there for twelve hours, and all that time I stood by the door to make sure no one came in. It made me feel so good! The more work you put into it, the better love is, I mean, the stronger you feel it, see?

IVANOV. Active love. Hmm. What is it—perversion, female philosophising? Or perhaps that's the way it ought to be. *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* Heaven only knows! *(Cheerfully.)* I'm not such a bad chap, Sasha, honestly. Judge for yourself. I've always enjoyed philosophising, but never have I said "Our women are not what they used to be" or "she's strayed off the straight and narrow." I've just been grateful to them, that's all! That's all! My dear child, how amusing you are! I'm just a silly oaf! Embarrass God-fearing folk by bemoaning my fate all day. *(Laughs.)* Boo-hoo-hoo! *(Walks away quickly.)* But you must go, Sasha! We shouldn't be behaving like this...

SASHA. Yes, it's time I went. Good-bye. I'm afraid your honest doctor might tell your wife I'm here out of a sense of duty. Listen to me. Go to your wife now and stay with her, stay as long as you have to. A year if necessary. Or ten years. Do your duty. Grieve, beg her forgiveness, weep—all as it should be. And the main thing, don't neglect your business.

IVANOV. I've got that feeling again, as if I'd eaten a toadstool. Again!

SASHA. God bless you! You can forget about me completely! I'll be happy if you just scribble me a line in a couple of weeks. But I'll write to you...

Borkin peeps round the door

VIII

BORKIN. May I come in, sir? *(Catches sight of Sasha.)* Sorry, I haven't seen a thing. *(Comes in.)* Bonjour! *(Bows to them.)*

SASHA *(embarrassed).* Good-day.

BORKIN. You've got plumper and prettier.

SASHA *(To Ivanov).* Well, I'll be going. I'm off. *(Goes out.)*

BORKIN. What a wonderful vision! Came for prose and found sheer poetry. *(Sings.)* "Then you came in sight as a bird wings to light..."

Ivanov walks round the stage agitatedly

(Sits down.) You know, Nicolas, she's got something none of the others have. Don't you think? Something special ... something phantasmagorical... *(Sighs.)* In fact, she's the richest young lady in the whole district, but her mother's such a skinflint that no one will have anything to do with her. When she dies everything will go to Sasha, but until then all she'll give is ten thousand, a pair of pleating tongs and an iron, and make you kiss the ground she treads on. *(Rummages in his pockets.)* Think I'll have a cigar. Care for one? *(Offers his cigar-case.)* They're not bad, you know.

IVANOV *(walks up to Borkin, fuming with rage).* Will you kindly get out of this house at once! This very minute!

Borkin gets up and drops his cigar

Out! This very minute!

BORKIN. Nicolas, what's the matter? Why are you so angry?

IVANOV. Where did you get those cigars? Do you think I don't know where you take the old man each day and why?

BORKIN *(shrugs).* What's it got to do with you?

IVANOV. You scoundrel! Your rascally projects, which you boast of all over the district, have ruined my reputation! You and I have nothing in common, and I ask you to leave my house this very moment! *(Striding about quickly.)*

BORKIN. I know you're saying this because you're upset, so I won't get angry. Insult me as much as you like. *(Lifts his cigar.)* But it's time you gave up being so melancholy. You're not at high school anymore, you know...

IVANOV. What did I tell you? *(Shaking.)* Are you playing with me?

Enter Anna

IX

BORKIN. Look now, your wife's come. I'll be going. *(Goes off.)*

Ivanov stops by the desk and stands there, head hanging

ANNA *(after a pause).* Why did she come here?

Pause

I'm asking you. Why did she come here?

IVANOV. Don't ask, Anna.

Pause

I'm dreadfully guilty. Think up any punishment you like,

I'll suffer anything. Only don't ask. I haven't got the strength to talk.

ANNA *(angrily).* Why was she here?

Pause

So that's what you're like! Now I understand you. At last I see what sort of a person you are. Dishonourable, base. Remember when you came and lied to me that you loved me. I believed you and left my father, my mother and my religion to follow you. You lied to me about truth, about goodness, about your highminded plans, and I believed every word.

IVANOV. I've never lied to you, Anna.

ANNA. I lived with you for five years, sick and suffering, but I loved you and did not leave you for a single moment. You were my god. And all the time you were deceiving me in the most despicable fashion.

IVANOV. Don't say that, Anna, it's not true. I was wrong, yes, but I've never lied to you. You mustn't accuse me of that.

ANNA. Now I see it all. You married me thinking my father and mother would forgive me and let me have the money. That's what you thought.

IVANOV. Dear God! Anna, don't try my patience like that... *(Weeps.)*

ANNA. Be quiet! When you saw there was no money, you started another game. Now I remember everything and understand everything. *(Weeps.)* You never loved me and were never faithful to me. Never!

IVANOV. That's not true, Sarah! Say what you like, but don't insult me with lies.

ANNA. You mean, dishonest man! You owe money to Lebedev and to get out of paying you want to turn his daughter's head, deceive her as you deceived me. That's true, isn't it?

IVANOV *(breathing hard).* Be quiet, for God's sake! I

don't answer for myself. I'm so angry, I ... I might say something to hurt you.

ANNA. You've always played mean tricks, and not just on me. You tried to blame them on Borkin, but now I know whose they were.

IVANOV. Be quiet, Sarah. Go away, or I won't be able to hold my tongue! I'm tempted to tell you something awful, insulting. *(Shouts.)* Be quiet, you yid!

ANNA. I won't be quiet. You've deceived me too long for me to be quiet.

IVANOV. So you won't be quiet, eh? *(Struggling to control himself.)* For God's sake.

ANNA. Now go and deceive the Lebedev girl.

IVANOV. Then let me tell you that you're soon going to ... die. The doctor told me you're soon going to die.

ANNA *(sits down, in a weak voice).* When did he tell you?

Pause

IVANOV *(clutching his head).* What a dreadful thing to say! Oh, God, what a dreadful thing to say! *(Sobs.)*

Curtain

About a year elapses between acts three and four

ACT FOUR

One of the drawing rooms in the Lebedevs' house. Front stage is an arch separating the drawing room from the ballroom. Doors right and left. Old bronzes and family portraits. Festive preparations. A piano with a violin on it and a cello standing nearby. Throughout the act people in evening dress walk round the ballroom

I

LVOV *(comes in and looks at his watch).* It's after four. I expect the blessing's starting now. They'll be blessed, then go to church to be wed. Thus truth and virtue triumph! Didn't manage to get his hands on Sarah's money, so he tormented her to death and now he's found another victim. And he'll lie to this one too, until he's got her money and sent her to her grave as well, like poor Sarah. A typical case of ruthless scrounging.

Pause

He's in his seventh heaven. He'll live happily to a ripe old age and die with a clear conscience. No, I'll show people what you're really like. When I rip that cursed mask off you and everyone sees you for what you are, you'll plunge down headfirst from your seventh heaven into such a deep pit that the Devil himself could not pull you out! As an honest man it's my duty to protect and open the eyes of the blind. I'll do my duty, then leave this God-forsaken hole once and for all tomorrow! *(Reflects.)* But how shall I do it? It's no good trying to explain to the Lebedevs. Challenge him to a duel? Make a scene? Goodness, I'm as nervous as a schoolboy. I can't decide. What would be best? A duel?

II

KOSYKH *(comes in, happily to Lvov).* Yesterday I bid a little slam in clubs and got a grand one instead. Only that Barabanov spoilt it all for me again! I bid one no trumps. He says pass. I bid two clubs. He says pass. I put down two diamonds ... three clubs ... and just imagine, I call a slam, and he doesn't show his ace. If the scoundrel had shown his ace, I'd have called a grand slam in no trumps...

LVOV. Excuse me, but I don't play cards and therefore cannot share your delight. Is the blessing soon?

KOSYKH. Yes, I should think so. They're bringing Zyuzyushka round with smelling salts. She's howling her head off. Can't bear to part with the dowry.

LVOV. Perhaps it's her daughter she can't bear to part with?

KOSYKH. No, it's the dowry. And you can understand her. If he marries her daughter, she doesn't get her loan back. You don't take your son-in-law to court.

III

BABAKINA *(dressed up to the eyes walks across the stage past Lvov and Kosykh. The latter giggles into his fist. She looks round).* Stupid!

Kosykh puts a finger on her waist and chortles

Clumsy oaf! *(Exit.)*

KOSYKH *(chortling).* The lass has gone off her rocker. She was alright till she set her heart on being a countess, but now you can't get near her. *(Imitates her.)* "Clumsy oaf!"

LVOV *(excitedly).* Listen, tell me honestly, what do you think of Ivanov.

KOSYKH. Hopeless. Can't play bridge for toffee. I remember last year in Lent. The four of us were playing: me, the Count, Borkin and him. I dealt...

LVOV *(interrupting).* Is he a good man?

KOSYKH. Him? He's a downright rogue. A charlatan of the first water. He and the Count are a fine pair. They're always on the make. Had no luck with the Jewess, so now he's after Zyuzyushka's coffers. Bet you anything that a year from now he'll finish Zyuzyushka off. And the Count will do Babakina in. They'll take the money and live

happily ever after. Why are you so pale today, Doctor? You're as white as a sheet.

LVOV. It's nothing. Just had a bit too much to drink yesterday.

IV

LEBEDEV *(enters with Sasha).* We can talk here. *(To Lvov and Kosykh.)* Go and join the ladies in the hall, you Zulus. We need to have a private talk.

KOSYKH *(walks past Sasha and snaps his fingers admiringly).* What a picture! The queen of trumps!

LEBEDEV. Get a move on, you cave-man. Get a move on!

Lvov and Kosykh go out

Sit down, Sasha, that's right. *(Sits down and looks round.)* Now listen to me carefully and remember what I say. Your mother has asked me to tell you this. See? I'm not speaking for myself, it's what your mother told me.

SASHA. Come to the point, Father.

LEBEDEV. Your dowry is fifteen thousand roubles in silver. See. Let's get that straight right from the start. But wait for it, there's another treat in store for you. Your dowry is fifteen thousand, but bearing in mind that Nikolai owes your mother nine thousand that sum is to be deducted from it. Yes, and another thing...

SASHA. Why are you telling me this?

LEBEDEV. Your mother told me to!

SASHA. Leave me alone! If you had the slightest respect for me and yourself, you would never say such a thing to me. I don't want your dowry! I never asked for it and I'm not asking now!

LEBEDEV. Don't snap at me like that! Gogol's two rats came and sniffed first, then ran away, but you went for me without even sniffing. That's emancipation for you.

SASHA. Leave me alone. Don't insult me with your petty calculations.

LEBEDEV *(losing his temper).* Pah! What with the two of you, I'll either stick a knife in myself or cut someone else's throat! One moans and pesters the living daylights out of me, counting every copeck, while the other is so emancipated, dammit, so clever and high-minded that she can't even understand her own father! I'm insulting her! Now listen, my lass, before coming here to insult you, I was almost torn to pieces in there *(points at the door)* almost hanged, drawn and quartered. It's hopeless! Her head's been turned and she's lost her wits. Damn the lot of you! *(Walks over to the door and stops.)* I don't like it. I don't like anything about it!

SASHA. What don't you like?

LEBEDEV. I don't like anything. Anything at all!

SASHA. What do you mean?

LEBEDEV. Well, I'm not going to sit down and spell it out to you. I don't like anything, your wedding least of all! *(Goes up to Sasha, affectionately.)* Forgive me, Sasha, maybe your wedding is very clever, honest, high-minded and high-principled, but there's something wrong with it! It's not like other weddings. You're as young, fresh and pure as crystal, but he's a jaded, worn-out widower. And I don't understand him either, for God's sake. *(Kisses his daughter.)* Forgive me, Sasha, but there's something wrong with it. Too much nasty gossip. First that Sarah of his dies, now suddenly he wants to marry you. *(Animatedly.)* I sound like a gossipy old woman. That's what I've turned into. Don't listen to me. Or anybody. Just listen to yourself.

SASHA. I feel myself that there's something wrong, Papa. Wrong, wrong, wrong. If only you knew how hard it is for me. Intolerably hard. I'm afraid and embarrassed to admit it, Papa dear, so do cheer me up, please. Tell me what to do.

LEBEDEV. What's that? What?

SASHA. I've never been so afraid in my life! *(Looks round.)* I feel as if I don't understand him and never will. Ever since we got engaged, he hasn't smiled once or looked me straight in the eye. He does nothing but complain, repent, hint that he's guilty of something, shudder... I'm worn out. There are even moments when I think that I ... I don't love him as much as I should. And when he comes to see us or talks to me, I feel so depressed. What does it all mean, Papa? It's awful!

LEBEDEV. My dear girl, my one and only child, listen to your old father. Tell him it's off!

SASHA *(frightened).* What are you saying!

LEBEDEV. That's right, Sasha. There'll be a scandal and the tongues will wag like mad, but it's better to have a scandal than to ruin your whole life.

SASHA. Don't say that, Papa! I refuse to listen to you. I mustn't let myself think gloomy thoughts. He's a good, unhappy, misunderstood person. I'll love him, understand him, put him back on his feet. I'll do my duty. My mind's made up!

LEBEDEV. That's not duty, it's madness.

SASHA. No more. I've confessed something to you that I didn't want to admit even to myself. Don't tell anyone. Let's forget it.

LEBEDEV. I don't understand a thing. Either I've got stupid in my old age, or you've all got very clever, but I can't understand a thing for the life of me.

V

SHABELSKY *(coming in).* The devil take the lot of them, myself included! It's infuriating!

LEBEDEV. What's the matter?

SHABELSKY. No, seriously, I must do something so absolutely foul and disgusting that it will appal not only me

but everyone else. And I will. Honestly! I've told Borkin to announce today that I'm getting married. *(Laughs.)* Everyone's rotten, so I'll be rotten too.

LEBEDEV. I'm sick of you! Listen, Matvei, if you don't mind my saying so, you'll talk yourself into the madhouse if you're not careful.

SHABELSKY. And is the madhouse so different from any other house, pray? Do me a favour, carry me off there straightaway. Do me a favour. Everyone's rotten, petty, mean and disgusting. I detest myself and don't trust a single word I say.

LEBEDEV. You know what, old chap? Put some old rope in your mouth, light it and then breathe all over people. Or better still, take your hat and go home. There's a wedding here, everyone's in a good mood, yet you're croaking away like an old crow. Yes, really...

Shabelsky leans over the piano and sobs

Good heavens! Matvei! Count! What's the matter? Matvei, my dear fellow... I've offended you. Forgive an old dog. An old soak. Have a drink of water.

SHABELSKY. I don't want one. *(Raises his head.)*

LEBEDEV. What are you crying for?

SHABELSKY. It's nothing.

LEBEDEV. Yes, it is, Matvei, don't lie. What's the reason?

SHABELSKY. I looked at the cello just now and ... and remembered the little Jewess...

LEBEDEV. Oh, my goodness, what a time to remember her! God rest her soul, but this isn't the right moment to remember...

SHABELSKY. I used to play duets with her. She was a fine, wonderful woman!

Sasha sobs

LEBEDEV. What's the matter with you? That's enough! Heavens, they're both crying their eyes out, and I ... I ... Do go away somewhere, or the guests will see.

SHABELSKY. When the sun shines, you're happy even in a cemetery, Pasha. And when there's hope, you feel good even in old age. But I have no hope, nothing.

LEBEDEV. Yes, you are in a bad way. No children, no money, no occupation. Still, it can't be helped! *(To Sasha.)* Now what's the matter with you?

SHABELSKY. Give me some money, Pasha. We'll settle up in the next world. I'll go to Paris and visit my wife's grave. I gave lots of money away in my time, half my fortune, so I have the right to ask. And it's a friend I'm asking.

LEBEDEV *(embarrassed).* I haven't got a sou, old chap! But alright, alright! That is, I don't promise, but you see ... very well, very well! *(Aside.)* They'll be the death of me!

VI

BABAKINA *(enters).* Where's my beau? How dare you leave me on my own, Count! Horrid thing! *(Smacks the Count's hand with her fan.)*

SHABELSKY *(with aversion).* Leave me alone! I hate you!

BABAKINA *(flabbergasted).* What? What's that?

SHABELSKY. Get away from me!

BABAKINA *(collapses into an armchair).* Ah! *(Starts crying.)*

ZINAIDA *(comes in crying).* Someone's arrived. I think it's the best man. It's time for the blessing. *(Sobs.)*

SASHA *(beseechingly).* Mother!

LEBEDEV. They're all bawling like mad! A whole quartet. That's enough boohooing! Matvei! Martha! If you're not careful I'll ... I'll start crying too. *(Weeps.)* Oh, my goodness!

ZINAIDA. If you don't need your mother, if you will have your way ... I'll do as you wish and give you my blessing.

Enter Ivanov in a tail-coat and gloves

VII

LEBEDEV. That was all we wanted. What's the matter?

SASHA. Why have you come?

IVANOV. Excuse me, everyone. I must have a word with Sasha on our own.

LEBEDEV. The groom's not supposed to come to the bride before the wedding. It's time you went to the church!

IVANOV. Please, Pasha.

Lebedev shrugs his shoulders. He, Zinaida, the Count and Babakina go off

VIII

SASHA *(sternly).* What do you want?

IVANOV. I'm choking with rage, but I can speak coolly. Listen. While I was dressing for church just now, I looked at myself in the mirror. There are grey hairs on my temples. It's not right, Sasha! We must stop this senseless comedy before it's too late. You're young and pure, you've got your whole life ahead of you, but I...

SASHA. That's all old stuff. I've heard it hundreds of times before, and I'm sick of it! Go to the church. Don't hold people up.

IVANOV. I'll go home now, and you tell your parents there won't be a wedding. Explain to them somehow. It's time I came to my senses. I've played Hamlet long enough, and you the noble young maid—let's call it a day.

SASHA *(exploding angrily).* How dare you speak like that! I won't listen to you.

IVANOV. But I'll go on saying it.

SASHA. Why did you come here? Your whining is becoming sheer mockery.

IVANOV. No, I'm not whining. Mockery. Yes, I am mocking. If I could mock myself a hundred times more and make the whole world laugh at me, I'd do it! I looked at myself in the mirror—and something seemed to snap in my conscience! I laughed at myself and nearly went mad with shame. *(Laughs.)* Melancholy! Noble anguish! Inexplicable grief! All it needs now is for me to write poetry. To whine, bemoan my fate, make people depressed, realise that my life's energy is spent for ever, that I have gone to seed, that I'm past my prime, that I have become faint-hearted and am wallowing up to my ears in this foul melancholy, to realise all that when the sun is shining, when even the ant carries its load and is content with its lot, no, thank you very much! To see that people think you a charlatan, others pity you or stretch out a helping hand and, worst of all, some listen reverently to your sighs, gaze upon you like a second Mohammed and wait for you to proclaim a new religion. No, thank God, I still have my pride and conscience! I laughed at myself all the way here, and the birds and trees seemed to be laughing at me too.

SASHA. That's not rage, it's madness!

IVANOV. You think so? No, I'm not mad. Now I see things in their true light, and my thoughts are as clear as your conscience. We love each other, but our wedding is not to be! I can rant and rave as much as I like, but I don't have the right to ruin others! I poisoned the last year of my wife's life with my whining. Since we got engaged, you've aged five years and quite forgotten how to laugh. Thanks to me your father, for whom everything in life was clear, has stopped understanding people. Wherever I go, visiting, hunting, or to a conference, I bring depression, misery and

discontent with me. No, don't interrupt! I'm being harsh and brutal, but forgive me. I am choking with rage and cannot speak differently. I never used to lie or revile life, but now I've become so peevish I find myself reviling it against my will, without realising it, bemoaning my fate, complaining, and everyone who listens gets infected by this disgust with life and begins to revile it too. And the tone in which I say it. As if I'm doing nature a favour by being alive. Damn me!

SASHA. Now wait a moment. From what you've said it follows that you're tired of whining and it's time to start a new life! That's splendid!

IVANOV. I don't see anything splendid. What new life? I'm finished. It's time we both realised that. A new life indeed!

SASHA. Pull yourself together, Nikolai! How can you say you're finished? Why be so cynical? No, I refuse to talk to you or listen to you. Go to the church!

IVANOV. I'm finished.

SASHA. Don't shout like that, the guests will hear.

IVANOV. If a reasonably intelligent, educated and healthy man for no obvious reason starts bemoaning his fate and going downhill, there's no stopping him, no saving him! How could I find salvation? In what? I can't turn to drink, wine makes my head ache. I can't write bad poetry. Nor can I worship my spiritual lethargy and see it as some noble virtue. Lethargy is lethargy, weakness is weakness, I have no other names for them. I'm finished, finished, there's no doubt about it! *(Looks round.)* Someone might come in. Listen. If you love me, then help me. Give me up this very moment! Quickly.

SASHA. Oh, Nikolai, if you only knew how you've exhausted me! Worn me out! Tell me, you kind, clever man, how can you make such demands? Each harder than the one before, day in, day out. I wanted an active love, but this is excruciating.

IVANOV. And when you're my wife, the demands will be even harder. Give me up! What motivates you is not love, can't you see? It's an honest person's stubborn resolve. You set yourself the task of resurrecting, saving the man inside me at all costs. And the idea of this noble act flattered you. Now you'd like to retreat, but false pride prevents you. Can't you see?

SASHA. What strange, crazy logic! How could I give you up? How on earth? You have no mother, sister or friends. You've lost all your money, your estate's been whittled away, people do nothing but slander your reputation...

IVANOV. It was stupid of me to come here. I should have done what I wanted to do...

Enter Lebedev

IX

SASHA *(runs up to her father).* Please help, Father. He's come here raving and upsetting me! He says I must give him up. Doesn't want to spoil my life. Tell him, I don't need his generosity! I know what I'm doing.

LEBEDEV. I can't understand a thing. What generosity?

IVANOV. The wedding's off!

SASHA. No, it isn't! Father, tell him the wedding isn't off!

LEBEDEV. Just a moment! Why do you want to call off the wedding?

IVANOV. I've already told her, but she refuses to understand.

LEBEDEV. No, it's me you should tell, not her, and tell me so I can understand it! Ah, Nikolai! May God be your judge! You've turned everything in our life upside down. It's like living in a curiosity shop. I look around and

can't recognise anything anymore. It's real torment. Well, what's an old man like me to do? Challenge you to a duel?

IVANOV. You don't need a duel. You just need to understand plain Russian.

SASHA *(paces agitatedly around the stage).* It's dreadful, dreadful! He's just like a child!

LEBEDEV. All I can do is throw up my hands in horror. Listen, Nikolai! You may think all this is very clever and subtle, in keeping with the laws of psychology, but I think it's a scandal and a disaster. Let me say what I have to say once and for all. Calm down! Look at things simply, like other people do! Everything in this world is simple. Ceilings are white, boots are black, sugar is sweet. You love Sasha and she loves you. Stay if you love her, go away if you don't, and we won't blame you. It's so simple! You're both healthy, clever, decent people, with enough to eat, thank the Lord, and clothes on your back. What else do you want? No money? Fiddlesticks! Money doesn't make you happy. Of course, I understand ... your estate's mortgaged and you can't pay the interest, but I'm a father, I understand. Let her mother do as she likes. If she won't give anything, she needn't. Sasha says she doesn't need a dowry. High principles, Schopenhauer... That's all rubbish. I've got ten thousand stored away in the bank. *(Looks round.)* Nobody here knows about it, not a living soul. From your grandmother. It's for the two of you. Take it, only promise that you'll give Matvei a couple of thousand...

Guests gather in the ballroom

IVANOV. All this talk is pointless, Pasha. I am acting as my conscience dictates.

SASHA. And I am acting as my conscience dictates too. You can say what you like, but I won't let you go. I'll go and call mother. *(Exit.)*

X

LEBEDEV. I don't understand a thing...

IVANOV. Listen, poor old chap. I won't try to persuade you that I'm honest or dastardly, healthy or a psychopath. It's a hopeless task anyway. Once I was young, passionate, sincere and no fool. I loved, hated and trusted differently from everyone else. I hoped and worked as hard as ten men. Tilted at windmills, banged my head against brick walls. Not bothering to calculate my strength, or reflect, ignorant of life, I took on a load which strained my back and racked my muscles. I squandered myself on youth alone, got intoxicated, obsessed, and overworked. But tell me: could I have done otherwise? There are so few of us and so much work to do. So much! Dear God, how much! And see how harshly the life I fought against has taken revenge! I've cracked up. A hangover at thirty, I'm already old, in a dressing gown. With a heavy head, a lethargic spirit, exhausted, played out, broken, with no faith, no love, no aim, I mooch around like a shadow, not knowing who I am, why I'm alive or what I want. And now it seems to me that love is nonsense and affection cloying, that there's no point in working, that songs and ardent speeches are cheap and stale. And everywhere I carry with me anguish, cold boredom, dissatisfaction and revulsion with life. I'm finished! Before you stands a man of thirty already exhausted, disillusioned, crushed by his worthless achievements. He burns with shame and mocks his own weakness. Ah, how my pride rebels. I'm choking with fury! *(Staggers.)* Look what a state I'm in! Can't even walk properly. I've grown weak. Where's Matvei? Let him take me home.

Voices in the hall: "The best man's arrived!"

XI

SHABELSKY *(enters).* In a shabby, borrowed tail-coat ... with no gloves ... and nothing but mocking looks, stupid quips and spiteful smiles from everyone. Loathsome lot!

BORKIN *(enters quickly with a bunch of flowers, in a tailcoat with the best-man's button-hole).* Where on earth is he? *(To Ivanov.)* They're waiting for you in the church, and here you are philosophising. What a comic! I ask you, what a comic! You're not supposed to go there with the bride. You go with me, then I come back for the bride. Surely you know that? He really is a comic!

LVOV *(enters, to Ivanov).* Ah, you're here? *(Loudly.)* Nikolai Ivanov, I declare for all to hear that you are a scoundrel!

IVANOV *(coldly).* My humble thanks.

General commotion

BORKIN *(to Lvov).* That's disgraceful, sir. I challenge you to a duel!

LVOV. Mr Borkin, I find it degrading not only to fight, but even to talk with you! But Mr Ivanov can have satisfaction whenever he wishes.

SHABELSKY. I shall duel with you, sir!

SASHA *(to Lvov).* Why? Why did you insult him? Let him tell me, everyone. Why?

LVOV. I didn't insult him without good reason, Miss Lebedev, I came here as an honest man to open your eyes, and beg you to listen to me.

SASHA. What can you say? That you're an honest man? Everyone knows that! But you just tell me honestly: do you understand yourself or not? You've come here, as an honest man, and delivered him a terrible insult, which nearly killed me. Before, when you dogged him like a shadow and made his life impossible, you were sure that you were doing your duty, that you were an honest man.

You interfered in his private life, said spiteful things about him behind his back and criticised him mercilessly. You never lost an opportunity to send anonymous letters to me and everyone who knows him. And all the time you thought yourself an honest man. You were so honest, Doctor, that you didn't even spare his sick wife and gave her no peace with your suspicions. And whatever cruel, mean things you do, you will always see yourself as an exceptionally honest and progressive person!

IVANOV *(laughing).* This is a parliament, not a wedding! Bravo! Bravo!

SASHA *(to Lvov).* So think about it. Do you understand yourself or not? Stupid, heartless people! *(Takes Ivanov by the hand.)* Let's go, Nikolai. Father, let's go!

IVANOV. We're not going anywhere. Wait a moment, and I'll put an end to all this! My youth has awoken, the other Ivanov is speaking now! *(Takes out his revolver.)*

SASHA *(screams).* I know what he's going to do! Don't, Nikolai, for God's sake!

IVANOV. I've been going downhill long enough. It's time I stopped. Time I took my leave! Stand back! Thank you, Sasha!

SASHA *(shouting).* Nikolai, for God's sake! Stop him!

IVANOV. Don't touch me! *(Runs to one side and shoots himself.)*

Curtain

1887

THE BEAR

A one-act farce

Dedicated to N. N. Solovtsov

CHARACTERS

ELENA POPOVA, a dimple-cheeked widow
GRIGORY SMIRNOV, a not-too-old country gentleman
LUKA, Popova's old manservant

The drawing-room in Mrs Popova's country-house

I

Mrs Popova dressed in deep mourning and gazing at a photograph and Luka

LUKA. It's not right, Ma'am. You'll do yourself no end of harm. Cook and chambermaid are out berry-picking, every living creature's enjoying itself, even the cat's having a good time, prancing about in the yard and chasing the dicky birds, but you just shut yourself up indoors all day as if you were in a nunnery. It's almost a year since you last went out of the house!

POPOVA. I shall never go out again. Why should I? My life is over. He is in his grave and I have buried myself within these four walls. We are both dead.

LUKA. There you go again! That's a fine way to talk! The master's no more, God rest his soul. The good Lord

has seen fit to take him away. You've done your bit of mourning, but you mustn't overdo it. You can't go on weeping and wearing black forever. My old missus passed away as well, you know. So what did I do? Mourned her for a month or two, then called it a day. The old girl wasn't worth any more moaning and groaning than that. *(Sighs.)* You never see anything of the neighbours. Don't go to visit them and won't have them here. Pardon me, Ma'am, but we live like spiders—never see the light of day. The mice have even nibbled holes in my uniform. It's not as if there weren't any nice folk around. The place is full of them. There's a regiment stationed at Ryblovo—strapping young officers, a real sight for sore eyes. Dances every Friday night at the camps and a brass band playing every day... Fair breaks my heart, Ma'am! There you are—a fine, handsome young woman, all peaches and cream,—could be having the time of your life. Beauty don't last forever, you know. Ten years from now you'll be wanting to catch the officers' eyes and twist the men round your little finger, but it'll be too late.

POPOVA *(firmly).* Kindly never say such things to me again, Luka. You know perfectly well that life lost all meaning for me when the master died. You think I am still alive, but you're wrong. I have sworn never to discard this mourning and never again to see the light of day. Do you hear? May his spirit see how I love him. Yes, I know it's no secret to you that he was often unfair to me, cruel, even ... unfaithful. But I shall be faithful to him to the grave. I'll show him how strongly I can love. Over there, on the other side, he will see me as I was before his death...

LUKA. Instead of talking like that you'd do better to go for a nice walk in the garden or get Toby or Giant harnessed and drive round to the neighbours...

POPOVA. Oh, dear! *(Starts crying.)*

LUKA. Oh, don't do that, Ma'am! There, there. God bless you.

POPOVA. He was so fond of Toby. He always took him when he visited the Korchagins or the Vlassovs. How wonderfully he used to drive. What a fine figure he made when he drew in the reins with all his might. Do you remember? Tell them to give Toby an extra bag of oats today.

LUKA. Yes, Ma'am.

A loud ring at the door

POPOVA *(starting up).* Who can that be? Tell them I'm not receiving anyone.

LUKA. Very well, Ma'am. *(Exit.)*

II

Mrs Popova alone

POPOVA *(gazing at the photograph).* You'll see how well I can love and forgive, mon cher Nicolas. My love shall not die until I do, until this poor heart stops beating. *(Laughing through her tears.)* Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Here am I, such a good girl, such a faithful little wife, who's locked herself up and will be true to you to the grave. But you ... aren't you ashamed of yourself, tubbykins? Deceiving me, making scenes, leaving me all alone for weeks on end...

III

Mrs Popova and Luka

LUKA *(enters, worried).* It's someone asking for you, Ma'am. Wants to see....

POPOVA. Didn't you say that I haven't received anyone since my husband died?

LUKA. Yes, but he wouldn't listen. Says it's very important.

POPOVA. I won't see an-y-bo-dy!

LUKA. I told him, but ... he's a proper devil ... swore and pushed past me into the dining room ... that's where he is now...

POPOVA *(annoyed).* Alright, show him in. How rude these people are!

Exit Luka

POPOVA. How difficult they are! What do they want from me? Why won't they leave me alone? *(Sighs.)* I see I really shall have to get me to a nunnery. *(Thinks.)* Yes, a nunnery...

IV

Mrs Popova, Luka and Grigory Smirnov

SMIRNOV *(enters and addresses Luka).* Blockhead! Just mind what you're saying! Silly ass! *(Sees Popova and assumes a dignified manner.)* Allow me to introduce myself, Madam. Grigory Smirnov, retired artillery lieutenant. I am compelled to trouble you on an extremely important matter.

POPOVA *(not offering her hand).* What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Your late husband, with whom I had the honour of being acquainted, owed me twelve hundred roubles on two bills of exchange. As I have to pay interest to the Land Bank tomorrow, I should be grateful if you could return the money today.

POPOVA. Twelve hundred! What did my husband owe you for?

SMIRNOV. He used to buy oats from me.

POPOVA *(sighing).* Don't forget to tell them to give

Toby that extra bag of oats today, Luka. *(Luka goes out.)* If my husband owed you money I shall pay it, of course, but I must ask you to excuse me, because I have no ready money today. My bailiff is due back from town the day after tomorrow and I shall ask him to pay you whatever is owing, but for the time being I cannot comply with your request. Moreover, it is exactly seven months today since my dear husband died, and in my present state of mind I do not feel at all disposed to deal with money matters.

SMIRNOV. And in my present state of mind if I don't pay the interest tomorrow I'll be ruined, thrown out by the scruff of my neck. They'll confiscate my estate.

POPOVA. You'll get the money the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV. I need it today.

POPOVA. I'm sorry, but I cannot pay you today.

SMIRNOV. And I'm sorry, but I can't wait until the day after tomorrow.

POPOVA. What can I do if I haven't the money now?

SMIRNOV. So you can't pay me?

POPOVA. No, I can't.

SMIRNOV. Hm... Is that your last word?

POPOVA. Yes, it is.

SMIRNOV. Positively your last word?

POPOVA. Positively my last word.

SMIRNOV. Most obliged to you. We'll make a note of that! *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* And they wonder why I'm not cool and collected. I meet the excise officer just now, on the way here, and he asks me why I'm always in such a bad temper. Heaven help me, how can I help being bad-tempered? I'm desperately in need of money. I leave home yesterday morning at the crack of dawn, do the rounds of all my debtors, and not a single one of them coughs up! I get dog-tired and spend the night sleeping by a vodka barrel in some flea-bitten hole of a place. Then finally I arrive here, forty miles from home, hoping to get

my money, and I'm treated to a "state of mind"! How can I help being bad-tempered?

POPOVA. I thought I had made myself quite clear. You will get your money when my bailiff returns from town.

SMIRNOV. I came to see you, not your bailiff! What the devil, pardon my language, do I want with your bailiff?

POPOVA. Forgive me, sir, but I'm not used to such language or to such a tone. I can listen to you no longer. *(Exit quickly.)*

V

Smirnov alone

SMIRNOV. I like that! "State of mind"! Her husband died seven months ago today! Have I got to pay that interest or haven't I? I ask you: have I, or haven't I? Alright, so your husband's died and you're in a state and all that, and your bailiff's gone off somewhere, damn his eyes, but what am I supposed to do? Fly away from my creditors on a magic carpet? Or bang my head against a brick wall? I go to see Gruzdev and he's not at home. Yaroshevich has gone into hiding. I have the devil of a row with Kuritsin and nearly throw him out of the window. Mazutov has got a stomach upset and this one's "in a state". Not one of the bastards will pay up. And all because I'm too soft with them, like a sloppy old woman. I'm too considerate. Well, just you wait! I'll show you! I won't let you play around with me, damn you! Here I am and here I stay, until she pays up. Phew! What a temper I'm in today. I'm shaking with rage, choking with it. It's made me feel quite ill! *(Calls out.)* Hey, there!

VI

Smirnov and Luka

LUKA *(enters).* What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Bring me some kvass or water.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. The logic of it! A man needs money so desperately he'd almost hang himself, and she won't pay because she doesn't feel like dealing with money matters, if you please. Typical female logic! Never did like talking to women and never will. Rather sit on a keg of gunpowder than talk to a woman. Brrr! That bunch of petticoats has got me in such a rage, I'm shaking all over. Only have to catch sight of one of those poetic creatures and it makes me so angry that I go all wobbly at the ankles. It's enough to make you shout for help.

VII

Smirnov and Luka

LUKA *(enters and serves him with the water).* Madam is indisposed and is not seeing anyone.

SMIRNOV. Get out, blast you!

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Indisposed and not seeing anyone! Alright, don't see me! I'll just stay here until you pay me the money. If you're indisposed for a week, I'll stay for a week. If it's a year, I'll stay a year. I'll show you, old girl. You won't get round me with your black dress and your dimples. We know all about those dimples! *(Shouts through the window.)* Unharness the horses, Semyon! We won't be leaving for a while. I'm staying here. Tell them in the stables to give the horses some oats. You stupid lout, the left side-horse is caught up in the reins again. *(Mimics him.)* "Never mind!" I'll give you "never mind"! *(Goes away from the window.)* It's sickening... This unbearable heat, no one paying up, a sleepless night, and now this

bunch of petticoats in mourning with her "states". I've got a headache. Perhaps I need a drop of vodka? Why not? *(Calls out.)* Hey, there!

LUKA *(enters).* What do you want?

SMIRNOV. Bring me a glass of vodka.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Ugh. *(Sits down and inspects himself.)* A pretty sight, I must say. Covered with dust, filthy boots, unwashed, hair in an awful mess, and bits of straw all over my waistcoat. The little lady must have taken me for a real brigand. *(Yawns.)* Not very *comme il faut* to turn up in someone's drawing room looking like this. Still never mind... I'm a creditor here, not a guest. There's no special etiquette for creditors.

LUKA *(enters and serves him with vodka).* You're taking a bit of a liberty, sir.

SMIRNOV *(angrily).* What's that?

LUKA. Er ... nothing, sir ... I just...

SMIRNOV. Who do you think you're talking to! Shut up!

LUKA *(aside).* We've got landed with a nasty piece of work here. Straight from the devil himself.

Exit Luka

SMIRNOV. Oh, what a rage I'm in. I could smash the whole world to smithereens. I feel quite ill ... *(Shouts out.)* Hey there!

VIII

Mrs Popova and Smirnov

POPOVA *(enters with eyes downcast.)* Sir, in my solitude I have grown unaccustomed to people's voices and

cannot endure shouting. I beg you most earnestly not to disturb me.

SMIRNOV. Pay me the money and I'll go.

POPOVA. I've told you in plain language: I haven't got any ready money at the moment. Wait until the day after tomorrow.

SMIRNOV. I also had the honour of telling you in plain language: I need the money today, not the day after tomorrow. If you don't pay me today, I shall have to hang myself tomorrow.

POPOVA. But what can I do, if I haven't the money? How strange you are!

SMIRNOV. So you won't pay me now, eh?

POPOVA. I can't.

SMIRNOV. In that case I'll stay here until you can. *(Sits down.)* You'll pay me the day after tomorrow, eh? That's fine. Then I'll stay here like this until the day after tomorrow. Just sitting here like this ... *(Jumps up.)* I ask you: do I have to pay the interest tomorrow, or don't I? Perhaps you think I'm joking?

POPOVA. I beg you not to shout, sir. This isn't a stable.

SMIRNOV. I'm not asking you about a stable, I'm asking you whether I have to pay the interest tomorrow, or not?

POPOVA. You don't know how to behave in the company of a lady.

SMIRNOV. Oh yes, I do know how to behave in the company of a lady.

POPOVA. No, you don't. You're coarse and bad-mannered. Respectable people don't talk to a lady like that.

SMIRNOV. Well, this is a surprise! How would you like me to talk to you then? In French? *(Angrily and affectedly.) Madame, je vous prie* ... how delighted I am that you won't pay me back my money... Oh, pardon me for bothering you. What exquisite weather it is today. And

how that black dress becomes you. *(Bows extravagantly.)*

POPOVA. Silly and bad-mannered.

SMIRNOV *(mimicking her).* Silly and bad-mannered! I don't know how to behave in the company of a lady! Madam, I've seen more women in my time than you have sparrows. I fought three duels over them, jilted twelve of them and been jilted by nine. Yes, my dear lady. Time was when I used to prance round them like a fool, idolise them, pamper them, flatter them, bow and scrape to them. I loved, suffered, sighed, swooned, melted, shivered. I loved passionately, wildly, in all manner of ways, damn it! I chattered away like a magpie about female emancipation and wasted half my fortune on the objects of my affection. But now, not for all the world! You won't fool me now. I have had enough! Passionate dark eyes, ruby lips, dimpled cheeks, moonlight, soft whispers, gentle sighs—I wouldn't give you tuppence for the whole lot, Madam. Present company excepted, of course, but all women, young or old alike, are affected, spiteful, vain, petty, heartless, infuriatingly illogical, gossip-mongers and born liars. And as for this *(tapping his forehead)*—excuse my being so frank—any sparrow is a genius compared with a philosopher in petticoats. The sight of one of these poetic beings—a demi-goddess, muslin-clad and ethereal—sends you into a thousand raptures, yet gaze into her soul and what do you find—a regular hyena. *(Grabs hold of the back of the chair which splits and breaks.)* But the most infuriating thing is that for some reason this hyena imagines that loving is its special talent, privilege and monopoly! Damn it all, you can hang me upside down on that nail over there if a woman is capable of feeling the slightest affection for anything but a lapdog. All she does when she's in love is snivel and complain! While the man suffers and sacrifices, her love consists of rustling her skirts and trying to twist him round her little finger. You have the misfortune of being a woman, so you must know all about the female character

from your own. Tell me quite bonestly: have you ever met a woman who was sincere, faithful and constant? You haven't. Only old or ugly ones are faithful and constant. You're more likely to find a cat with horns than a constant woman!

POPOVA. Begging your pardon, but exactly who then, in your opinion, is faithful and constant in love? The man?

SMIRNOV. Yes, the man.

POPOVA. The man! *(Laughs bitterly.)* The man is faithful and constant in love! Well, that *is* news! *(Heatedly.)* What right have you to say that? Men are faithful and constant! Since we're about it, I would like you to know that of all the men I have ever known my late husband was the best. I loved him dearly, with all my soul, as only a young, intelligent woman can love. I gave him my youth, my happiness, my life and my fortune. He was my be all and end all. I worshipped him like an idol and ... and ... then what? This best of all men deceived me at the drop of a hat in the most shameless way. After his death I found a whole drawer full of love letters in his desk, and when he was alive—I shudder to think of it—he used to leave me all alone for weeks on end, flirt shamelessly with other women and deceive me before my very eyes. He frittered away my money and mocked my feelings. Yet in spite of all this I loved him and remained true to him. What is more, I am still faithful and constant to him even though he is dead. I have buried myself forever within these four walls and shall never discard this mourning to my dying day...

SMIRNOV *(laughing scornfully).* Mourning! What do you take me for? As if I didn't know why you are wearing that black hooded cloak and have buried yourself within these four walls! It's all so mysterious, so poetic. Some young army officer or idiot of a poet will drive past the house, look up at the window and think: "Ah, there lives the mysterious Tamara who has buried herself within those

four walls for love of her dead husband." We know all those little tricks.

POPOVA *(flaring up).* How dare you say such things to me!

SMIRNOV. You've buried yourself alive but you didn't forget to powder your nose.

POPOVA. How dare you talk to me like that!

SMIRNOV. Don't shout please. I'm not your bailiff. And kindly allow me to speak plainly. I'm not a woman and I'm used to speaking my mind! Kindly don't shout.

POPOVA. You're the one who's shouting, not me. Kindly leave me alone!

SMIRNOV. Pay me the money and I'll go.

POPOVA. I won't pay you.

SMIRNOV. Oh, yes, you will.

POPOVA. Just to spite you, I won't give you a farthing! Go away and leave me alone.

SMIRNOV. I haven't the pleasure of being either your husband or your fiancé, so please don't make a scene. *(Sits down.)* I don't like it.

POPOVA *(fuming with rage).* You dare to sit down?

SMIRNOV. Yes.

POPOVA. Kindly leave immediately.

SMIRNOV. Kindly give me my money... *(Aside.)* Oh, how furious I am!

POPOVA. I do not propose to talk to impudent rascals! Kindly get out! *(Pause.)* So you're not going?

SMIRNOV. No.

POPOVA. Not going?

SMIRNOV. No!

POPOVA. Very well then. *(Rings.)*

IX

The others and Luka

POPOVA. See this gentleman out, Luka.

LUKA. Please leave when you're told to, sir. It's not right...

SMIRNOV *(leaping up.)* Shut up! Who do you think you're talking to? I'll make mincemeat out of you!

LUKA *(clutching his chest).* Mercy me! *(Collapses into an armchair.)* I've come over all funny. Can't get my breath.

POPOVA. Where's Dasha? *(Shouts.)* Dasha! Martha! Dasha! *(Rings.)*

LUKA. They're all out berry-picking. Ooh. I'm ill! Water!

POPOVA. Will you please get out of here!

SMIRNOV. Will you please be a little more polite.

POPOVA *(clenching her fists and stamping.)* You lout! You great bear! You bully! You monster!

SMIRNOV. What's that? What did you say?

POPOVA. I said you were a bear, a monster!

SMIRNOV *(advancing towards her).* And what gives you the right to insult me, pray?

POPOVA. What if I am insulting you? Do you think I'm afraid of you?

SMIRNOV. And do you think you have the right to insult someone and get away with it just because you belong to the fair sex? Eh? I challenge you to a duel!

LUKA. Mercy me! Water!

SMIRNOV. Pistols!

POPOVA. And do you think I'm afraid of you just because you have big fists and bellow like an ox? You bully!

SMIRNOV. A duel! I won't be insulted by anyone, even if it is a member of the weaker sex.

POPOVA *(trying to shout him down).* You great bear! Bear! Bear!

SMIRNOV. It's high time we got rid of the idea that only men have to answer for their insults. Equal rights

means equal rights, damn it! I challenge you!

POPOVA. So you want a duel, do you? Delighted to oblige.

SMIRNOV. This very minute.

POPOVA. This very minute it shall be. My husband had some pistols. I'll go and fetch them. *(Hurries out, then returns.)* How I shall enjoy sending a bullet into that thick skull of yours! Damn you! *(Exit.)*

SMIRNOV. I'll shoot her like a sitting duck. I'm no young lad, no sentimental pup! The weaker sex doesn't exist as far as I'm concerned.

LUKA. Dear, kind sir! *(Getting down on his knees.)* Take pity on an old man, I beseech you. Go away from here. You've frightened me to death, and now you're going to have a duel.

SMIRNOV *(ignoring him).* A duel. There's equal rights for you, there's emancipation for you. Both sexes quite equal. I'll shoot her as a matter of principle. But what a woman! *(Mimics her.)* "Damn you ... I'll send a bullet into that thick skull of yours." What a woman! Her face flushed, her eyes sparkled and she accepted the challenge! I've never seen another like her in all my life...

LUKA. Go away, kind sir. And I'll pray for you for the rest of my days.

SMIRNOV. There's a woman for you! I should say so! A real woman! No moping and moaning—all fire and sparks. It seems a pity to knock her off.

LUKA *(weeping).* Dear, kind sir ... please go away.

SMIRNOV. I like her. I really do. In spite of the dimples. Wouldn't even mind forgetting about the debt. And my bad temper's gone. A marvellous woman!

X

The others and Mrs Popova

POPOVA *(enter with pistols).* Here are the pistols. Before we start perhaps you would oblige by showing me how to use them. I've never held a pistol in my life...

LUKA. Merciful Heavens. I'll go and fetch the gardener and the coachman. What's brought this disaster upon us? *(Exit.)*

SMIRNOV *(inspecting the pistols).* Well, there are several types of pistols, you see. There's the Mortimer, that's a special duelling pistol with capsules. These pistols of yours are Smith Wessons, triple action with ejector and central fire. Lovely things. Worth at least ninety roubles the pair. You hold it like this... *(Aside.)* What eyes! What eyes! She's enough to set a man on fire.

POPOVA. Like this?

SMIRNOV. That's right. Then you cock the hammer ... and take aim like this. Head back a little. Stretch out your arm as far as you can ... that's it. Then you press this with your finger—and that's all there is to it. The main thing is not to get flustered and not to hurry when you're taking aim. Try to keep your hand from shaking.

POPOVA. I see... It's not very convenient shooting indoors. Let's go into the garden.

SMIRNOV. Very well. But I warn you that I shall fire into the air.

POPOVA. That's the last straw! Why?

SMIRNOV. Because ... because... That's my business.

POPOVA. Lost your nerve, have you? Eh? Ha, ha! No, sir. Don't start making excuses. Kindly follow me! I shan't rest until I've made a hole in your forehead ... that forehead there, the one I hate so much! So you've lost your nerve, have you?

SMIRNOV. Yes.

POPOVA. You're lying. Why don't you want to duel?

SMIRNOV. Because ... because ... I find you too attractive.

POPOVA *(laughing angrily).* He finds me too attractive! He has the presumption to say he finds me attractive. *(Points to the door.)* Good day, sir.

SMIRNOV *(puts down the revolver in silence, picks up his cap and goes to the door; he stops and they look at each other for about thirty seconds without speaking; then he walks up to Popova hesitantly and says).* Listen... Are you still angry? I'm in a devilish rage, too, but you see ... how can I put it? The fact is, you see, strictly speaking this sort of business... *(Shouts.)* Can I help it if I find you attractive? *(Grabs the back of a chair which splits and breaks.)* Damned fragile furniture you've got here! I find you attractive! Do you understand? I ... I'm almost in love with you!

POPOVA. Keep away from me. I hate you!

SMIRNOV. By Jove, what a woman! I've never seen another like her in all my life! I'm finished! Done for! Caught like a mouse in a trap!

POPOVA. Keep your distance, or I'll shoot.

SMIRNOV. Shoot then! You can't imagine what joy it would be to die under the gaze of those wonderful eyes, to die from a revolver held in that tiny velvet hand. I've taken leave of my senses. You must decide now, for if I go out of this house we shall never meet again! Make your decision. I come from a good family. I'm an honest man, I have an income of ten thousand a year. I can hit a coin in the air. I've got some splendid horses. Will you be my wife?

POPOVA *(angrily brandishes her revolver).* A duel! I challenge you!

SMIRNOV. I've gone mad! I don't understand anything! *(Shouts.)* Hey, there! Bring some water!

POPOVA *(shouts).* I challenge you!

SMIRNOV. I've gone mad. I'm head over heels in love like a young stripling, like a fool! *(Seizes her hand and she squeals with pain.)* I love you! *(Gets down on his knees.)* I love you as I've never loved before. I jilted twelve women and nine jilted me, but I never loved any of them like I love you. I've gone all sugary and syrupy and soft... I'm down on my bended knees like a fool, proposing. What a shocking disgrace! Haven't fallen in love for five years. Swore I wouldn't. And now I've gone and put my neck in the noose! I offer you my hand. Yes or no? You don't have to, if you don't want to. *(Gets up and walks quickly to the door.)*

POPOVA. Stop...

SMIRNOV *(stops).* Well...

POPOVA. Nothing ... you can go... But, stop... No, you can go! I hate you! Or do I? Don't go! Ah, if only you knew how angry I am! *(Throws the revolver on to the table.)* This wretched thing has made my fingers go numb. *(Tears her kerchief with rage.)* What are you standing there for? Get out!

SMIRNOV. Adieu.

POPOVA. Yes, yes, get out! *(Shouts.)* Where are you going? Stop! Oh well, go! Ah, how angry I am! Keep your distance! Keep your distance!

SMIRNOV *(goes up to her).* How furious I am with myself! I've fallen in love like a schoolboy. Gone down on my bended knees. It's enough to make your flesh creep. *(Roughly.)* I love you! Of all the stupid things to do! Tomorrow I've got to pay the interest, haymaking has started, and now there's you... *(Puts his arms round her waist.)* I'll never forgive myself.

POPOVA. Keep your distance! Take your hands off me! I ... hate you! I ch-challenge you! *(A long kiss.)*

XI

The same, Luka with an axe, the gardener with a pitchfork and some workmen with poles

LUKA *(seeing the kissing couple).* Mercy me! *(Pause.)*

POPOVA *(with downcast eyes).* Luka, tell them not to give Toby any oats today.

Curtain

1888

THE ANNIVERSARY

A one-act farce

CHARACTERS

ANDREI SHIPUCHIN, Chairman of the Board of the N. Mutual Credit Society, not too old, wears a monocle
TATIANA, his wife aged 25
KIRIN, the bank's elderly bookkeeper
Mrs MERCHUTKINA, an elderly woman in an old-fashioned cape
SHAREHOLDERS
BANK EMPLOYEES

The action takes place in the N. Mutual Credit Bank

The office of the Chairman of the Board. A door left leads into the bank's general office. Two writing desks. The interior is designed to give an impression of tasteful luxury: velvet-upholstered furniture, flowers, statues, carpets and a telephone. Midday

Kirin alone and wearing felt boots

KIRIN *(shouts through the door).* Send someone to the chemist's for fifteen kopecks worth of valerian drops, and bring some fresh water to the Chairman's office! How many more times do I have to tell you! *(Walks to the desk.)* I'm worn out! I've been working for four days now without a wink of sleep, here in the daytime and at home all night.

(Coughs.) And to make matters worse I'm feverish all over. Shivering, high temperature, bad cough, weak at the knees and exclamation marks before the eyes! *(Sits down.)* That wretched Chairman of ours is going to present a report at the general meeting today. "Our bank, its present and future." Doesn't half fancy himself! *(Writes.)* One ... one ... six ... nought ... seven. That makes six ... nought ... one ... six... He's out to pull the wool over everyone's eyes, so I have to sit here and slave away for him. He's written a lot of airy-fairy nonsense, damn and blast him, so I have to sit up day and night to provide him with the figures *(Clicks away on his abacus.)* The devil take him! *(Writes.)* One ... three ... seven ... two ... one ... nought. He's promised to reward me for my pains. If all goes well today and he manages to fool them, he's going to give me a gold watch and a bonus of three hundred roubles. We'll see. *(Writes.)* But if all my work is in vain, don't you come complaining to me, my fine friend. I've got quite a temper, I have. Can't answer for my actions when I'm roused...

Noise and applause off-stage. Shipuchin's voice is heard saying: "Thank you! Thank you! I am deeply touched!" Enter Shipuchin. He is wearing a frock-coat and white tie and carrying an album which has just been presented to him

SHIPUCHIN *(standing in the doorway and addressing his remarks into the general office).* My dear colleagues, I shall cherish your gift until my dying hour as a memento of the happiest days in my life! Yes, indeed, gentlemen! Thank you once again! *(Blows them a kiss and goes up to Kirin.)* My dear friend, my most esteemed friend!

All the time he is on stage clerks keep coming in with papers for him to sign

KIRIN *(getting up.)* Allow me to congratulate you on the fifteenth anniversary of the bank, sir, and to express the hope that...

SHIPUCHIN *(vigorously shaking his hand).* Thank you, my dear friend, thank you! And allow me on this auspicious occasion, our anniversary, to embrace you! *(They embrace.)* I am very happy, very happy indeed. Thank you for your unstinting service, for everything. Thank you, my friend. If I have done anything of value while I have had the honour of being Chairman of this bank, then it is first and foremost thanks to my dear colleagues. *(Sighs.)* Yes, old man, fifteen years! Fifteen years—as sure as my name's Shipuchin! *(Eagerly.)* And how about my report? Is it nearly finished?

KIRIN. Yes, sir. Only five pages to go.

SHIPUCHIN. Excellent. That means it will be ready by three?

KIRIN. Yes, so long as no one disturbs me. I've just got to put the finishing touches.

SHIPUCHIN. That's splendid, absolutely splendid—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. The general meeting is at four. Be a good fellow and give me the first half now, so that I can study it properly. Come on. *(Takes the report.)* I am placing great hopes on this report. It is my *profession de foi,* or should I say my firework display. My firework display—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. *(Sits down and begins to read the report to himself.)* How devilish tired I am! Had an attack of gout last night, spent the whole morning rushing about getting things done, and now there's all this excitement, applause, and flurry ... I'm so tired!

KIRIN *(writing).* Carry two ... nought ... nought ... three ... nine ... two ... nought... These figures make everything look green. Take away three ... one ... six ... four ... one ... five... *(Clicks on his abacus.)*

SHIPUCHIN. There is another unpleasant matter. Your wife came to see me this morning and complained about you again. Said you chased her and your sister-in-law last night with a bread knife. What sort of behaviour is that, Kirin? It really won't do!

KIRIN *(sternly).* May I take the liberty of making a request, sir, since it is our anniversary? Would you kindly not interfere with my family life, if only out of respect for my hard work.

SHIPUCHIN *(sighs).* You're impossible, Kirin. You're a fine, upright person, yet you behave towards women as if you were Jack the Ripper. Really. I can't understand why you hate them so much.

KIRIN. And I can't understand why you love them so much. *(Pause.)*

SHIPUCHIN. The employees have just presented me with an album and I understand that the shareholders want to give me an address and a silver decanter. *(Plays with his monocle.)* That's fine—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. It certainly won't come amiss. A little pomp is necessary if the bank is to have a good reputation, damn it. You're a fellow who can be trusted and you know all about it, of course. I wrote the address myself and bought the silver decanter. And a leather cover for the address. That set me back forty-five roubles, but it had to be done. They'd never have thought of it themselves. *(Looks round.)* What a fine place we've got here. Eh? They say I pay too much attention to trifles, that I only care about having polished doorknobs, clerks wearing smart ties, and a uniformed attendant at the entrance. But no, gentlemen. Doorknobs and uniformed attendants are not trifles. I can be as common as I like at home, sleep and eat like a pig, drink myself silly...

KIRIN. No insinuations, if you please.

SHIPUCHIN. No one's making any insinuations. How impossible you are! Well, as I was saying, at home I can be a vulgar upstart und indulge my crude tastes, but here everything must be done in style. This is a bank! Every detail here must impress, must possess an air of dignity, so to say. *(Picks up a piece of paper and throws it into the fireplace.)* My great service is that I have raised the bank's

reputation! It's the tone that matters! Tone—as sure as my name's Shipuchin. *(Looks Kirin up and down.)* I say, old man, the deputation of shareholders might appear any moment now, and you're wearing felt boots and that old scarf—and your jacket's such an awful colour. You might have put on a frock coat, or at least a black suit.

KIRIN. My health is more precious to me than all your shareholders. I'm feverish all over...

SHIPUCHIN. But you do look a mess, you must agree. You're spoiling the whole effect.

KIRIN. I can hide when the deputation comes. That's no trouble... Carry seven ... one ... seven ... two ... one ... five ... nought. I don't like messes either. Seven ... two ... nine. *(Clicks on his abacus.)* I can't stand messes. It would have been better if you hadn't invited any ladies to the anniversary dinner this evening.

SHIPUCHIN. Nonsense.

KIRIN. I know you're going to fill the hall with them today just for appearance's sake. But you'd better look out. They'll ruin the whole show. They cause nothing but trouble and mess—women!

SHIPUCHIN. Quite the reverse. Female company is uplifting.

KIRIN. Is it, indeed? Your wife's supposed to be a well-bred woman, but she came out with something last Monday that made my hair stand on end for two whole days. All of a sudden she ups and asks me in front of other people: "Is it true that my husband has bought a lot of Dongo-Pongo shares that have fallen on the stock exchange? He's so worried." In front of strangers! I can't think why you confide in them. Do you want them to put you in the dock?

SHIPUCHIN. Now then, that's enough. Let's not get too gloomy on our anniversary. Incidentally, you've reminded me. *(Looks at his watch.)* My wife should be arriving soon. Strictly speaking I ought to have met her at

the station, the poor thing, but there's so little time and ... I do feel dreadfully tired. To tell you the truth, I'm not very glad she's coming. Er, that is, I am glad, of course, but it would have been nicer if she'd stayed on for another day or two at her mother's. She'll insist that I spend the whole evening with her, and we'd planned a nice little expedition after the dinner... *(Shudders.)* It's my nerves. I'm beginning to get the shakes. I'm so on edge that I could burst into tears at the merest trifle! No, I must be strong—as sure as my name's Shipuchin!

Enter Tatiana in a mackintosh with a travelling bag over her shoulder

SHIPUCHIN. Ha! Talk of the devil!

TATIANA. Darling! *(Rushes up to her husband. A prolonged kiss.)*

SHIPUCHIN. We were just talking about you. A minute ago! *(Looks at his watch.)*

TATIANA *(breathlessly).* Did you miss me? Are you well? I came here straight from the station. Haven't even been home yet. I've got so much to tell you, so much, I can hardly wait. I won't take my coat off. I've only dropped in for a minute. *(To Kirin.)* Good afternoon, Mr Kirin! *(To her husband.)* Is everything all right at home?

SHIPUCHIN. Yes, dear. You've got plumper and prettier in the last week... Did you enjoy your visit?

TATIANA. It was marvellous! Mother and Katya send their love. Vassily told me to give you a big hug. *(Hugs him.)* Aunty sent you a pot of jam and everyone's upset because you haven't written. Zina told me to give you a big kiss. *(Kisses him.)* If you only knew what's been going on there! The things that have been happening! It's terrible to even talk about them! Such goings-on! But I can tell from your eyes that you're not pleased to see me.

SHIPUCHIN. Of course I am. Dearest heart! *(Kisses her.)*

Kirin coughs angrily

TATIANA *(sighs deeply).* Poor Katya! Poor, dear Katya! I'm so sorry for her, so dreadfully sorry!

SHIPUCHIN. It's the bank's anniversary today, dearest. A deputation from the shareholders might appear at any minute, and you're not exactly dressed for the occasion.

TATIANA. The bank's anniversary! Oh, congratulations, everybody! Here's wishing you... So there'll be a meeting and a dinner today. Oh, I do enjoy all that. Do you remember the beautiful speech that you spent so long writing for the shareholders? Is that the one they are going to make to you today?

Kirin coughs angrily

SHIPUCHIN *(embarrassed).* We really shouldn't talk about that, dearest. Why don't you get along home?

TATIANA. Yes, in a minute. I'll just tell you what's been happening, then I'll be off. I'll begin right at the beginning. Well, then. When you saw me off, remember, I got a seat next to that stout woman and began to read. I don't like talking in railway carriages. Well, I read for three whole stations and didn't say a word to anybody. Then it got dark and I began to think all sorts of gloomy things. A young man was sitting opposite me, not bad-looking, with brown hair... Well, we got talking. Then a naval officer came up, and a student. *(Giggles.)* I told them I wasn't married. What a fuss they made of me! We talked right up to midnight. The brown-haired young man kept telling terribly funny stories and the officer sang all the time. I laughed so much I nearly split my sides. And when the officer—oh, those naval men—when the officer found out that my name was Tatiana, do you know what he sang? *(Sings in a bass voice.)* "Onegin, I cannot deny, I'll love Tatiana till I die." *(Giggles.)*

Kirin coughs angrily

SHIPUCHIN. We're disturbing Mr Kirin, Tanya. Go home, my dear. Later...

TATIANA. Never mind. Let him listen as well. It's terribly interesting and it won't take a minute. Seryozha met me at the station. Another young man was with him, a tax inspector, I believe ... not bad-looking, quite handsome, in fact, especially his eyes... Seryozha introduced us and we drove off together. The weather was heavenly...

Voices off-stage: "You can't go in there! Stop! What do you want?"

Enter Mrs Merchutkina

MERCHUTKINA *(in the doorway, shaking herself free from someone).* Keep your hands off me! Well, I never! I've come to see the boss. *(Enters. To Shipuchin.)* Begging your pardon, your Excellency. I'm Merchutkina. My husband's a Gubernia Secretary.

SHIPUCHIN. What do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Well, it's like this, you see, Your Excellency. My husband was ill for five months, and while he was in bed having treatment they went and gave him the sack without any reason, Your Excellency, and when I came to collect his pay, they'd deducted 24 roubles 36 kopecks from it. "What was that for?" I asks. "He borrowed from the Mutual Aid Fund and some people vouched for him," they told me. But that's rubbish. How could he have borrowed without asking my permission? They shouldn't have done it, your Excellency! I'm a poor woman. The only way I can make ends meet is by taking in lodgers. I'm weak, defenceless. I get pushed around all the time, never hear a kind word from anyone.

SHIPUCHIN. Allow me. *(Takes her application and reads it standing up.)*

TATIANA *(to Kirin).* I ought to begin at the beginning. Last week I suddenly had a letter from Mother. She said that someone called Grendilevsky had proposed to my

sister Katya. A fine, upright young man, but quite without any means or any definite status. And just imagine, as luck would have it, Katya fell in love with him. What were we to do? Mother told me to come immediately, and use my influence with Katya...

KIRIN *(severely).* Excuse me, but you've made me lose count. What with you and Mother and Katya, I've lost count and I don't know where I am.

TATIANA. What does that matter? You should listen when a lady is talking to you. Why are you so bad-tempered today? Perhaps you're in love! *(Giggles.)*

SHIPUCHIN *(to Merchutkina).* What's all this about? I don't understand.

TATIANA. You are in love? Ha. You're blushing!

SHIPUCHIN *(to his wife).* Tanya, dear, do go into the office for a minute. I won't be long.

TATIANA. Very well. *(Exit.)*

SHIPUCHIN. I don't know what you're talking about. You've obviously come to the wrong place, Madam. In fact your request has nothing to do with us whatsoever. You should apply to the department where your husband worked.

MERCHUTKINA. I've been to five offices already, sir, and none of them would even look at my petition. I was at my wits' end, then my son-in-law Boris told me to come and see you. "You go and see Mr Shipuchin, Mother," he said. "He's an influential gent. He can get anything done." Please help me, Your Excellency.

SHIPUCHIN. I'm afraid we can't do anything for you, Mrs Merchutkina. You must try and understand. As far as I can see your husband worked in the Army Medical Department. But this is a bank, a private, commercial concern. Don't you understand?

MERCHUTKINA. I've got the doctor's certificate to prove that my husband was ill, Your Excellency. Here it is. If you'd be so kind as to take a look.

SHIPUCHIN *(irritatedly).* That's very good. I believe you. But I repeat that this has nothing to do with us.

Tatiana's giggling is heard off-stage, followed by a man's laugh

SHIPUCHIN *(glancing at the door).* She's disturbing the clerks out there. *(To Merchutkina.)* It's strange, even ridiculous. Surely your husband knows where you should take the petition?

MERCHUTKINA. He doesn't know anything, Your Excellency. All he can say is "Mind your own business and leave me alone!"

SHIPUCHIN. I repeat, Madam. Your husband worked in the Army Medical Department. But this is a bank, a private, commercial...

MERCHUTKINA. Yes, yes. I see, sir. In that case, would you just tell them to pay me fifteen roubles. It doesn't matter if I don't get it all at once.

SHIPUCHIN *(sighs).* Heaven help me!

KIRIN. I shall never finish the report at this rate, sir.

SHIPUCHIN. Just a moment. *(To Merchutkina.)* Get it into your thick head! Coming to us with a request like that is as ridiculous as going to the chemist's or the weights and measures office for a divorce.

A knock at the door. Tatiana's voice is heard saying: "May I come in, Andrei?"

SHIPUCHIN *(shouting).* Just a moment, darling! *(To Mrs Merchutkina.)* So you weren't paid enough, but what has that to do with us? It's our anniversary today, Madam, and we're very busy. People might come in at any minute. Excuse me.

MERCHUTKINA. Take pity on me, Your Excellency. I'm just a weak, defenceless woman... All alone in the world... At my wits' end... What with taking the lodgers to court and looking after my old man's affairs and doing the housework, and my son-in-law out of work.

SHIPUCHIN. Mrs Merchutkina, I... No, excuse me, I simply can't talk to you anymore. My head's going round. You're wasting our time and your own. *(Sighs, aside.)* Here's a thick-head as sure as my name's Shipuchin. *(To Kirin.)* Mr Kirin, would you be kind enough to explain to Mrs Merchutkina.

Waves his hand in despair and goes into the other office

KIRIN *(goes up to Merchutkina. Threateningly).* What do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. I'm a weak, defenceless woman... Maybe I look strong, but if you took me to pieces you'd see I haven't got a healthy joint in my body. I can hardly keep on my feet and I've lost my appetite. Didn't even enjoy my cup of coffee this morning.

KIRIN. I said, what do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Tell them to give me fifteen roubles now, sir, and the rest in a month's time.

KIRIN. But you've already been told in words of one syllable—this is a bank.

MERCHUTKINA. Yes, yes, I know. I can show you the medical certificate.

KIRIN. Is that a head on your shoulders, or what?

MERCHUTKINA. I only want what's mine by rights. I don't want anyone else's money.

KIRIN. I ask you, Madam, is that a head on your shoulders, or what? I can't waste time talking to you, damn it! I'm very busy. *(Shows her the door.)* Good day to you.

MERCHUTKINA *(in amazement).* But what about the money?

KIRIN. So it's not a head on your shoulders, it's a block of wood.

Taps the desk and then his forehead

MERCHUTKINA *(taking offence).* Blockhead yourself! Tap your wife if you like, but I won't stand for it. You just

mind your step with me. My husband's a Gubernia Secretary.

KIRIN *(losing his temper and hissing).* Get out!

MERCHUTKINA. Now then! Don't you shout at me!

KIRIN *(hissing).* If you don't get out this very minute I'll send for the hall-porter! Out! *(Stamps his foot.)*

MERCHUTKINA. Don't stamp your foot at me. I'm not afraid of the likes of you. You old scallywag!

KIRIN. I've never seen anything so repulsive in all my life. Ugh! It fair turns you up. *(Breathing heavily.)* I'll tell you once more. Listen! If you don't get out this minute, you old bag, I'll make mincemeat of you. With a temper like mine, I could cripple you for life. I can't answer for my actions.

MERCHUTKINA. Shut up, you old blunderbuss. You can't frighten me. I've tackled worse than you.

KIRIN *(in despair).* I can't bear the sight of her. I feel ill! I can't stand it! *(Goes to his desk and sits down.)* The bank is infested with women and I can't write my report! I just can't stand it!

MERCHUTKINA. I'm not after anyone else's money, just what's mine by rights. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, wearing felt boots in a place like this. Ignorant lout.

Enter Shipuchin and Tatiana

TATIANA *(following her husband).* In the evening we went to the Berezhnitskys. Katya was wearing her pale blue taffeta, the one with lace trimming and a plunging neck-line. She looks lovely with her hair up, so I did it for her. She looked like a dream.

SHIPUCHIN *(who now has a splitting headache).* Yes, yes, like a dream. They might arrive at any minute now.

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency!

SHIPUCHIN *(miserably).* What is it now? What do you want now?

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency! *(Points at Kirin.)* That there ... that nasty piece of work over there tapped his forehead and then tapped the desk. You told him to look into my case and all he does is make fun of me and say all sorts of rude things. I'm just a weak, defenceless woman...

SHIPUCHIN. All right, Madam, I'll look into it and see that something is done. Later on. Now go away. *(Aside.)* My gout's coming on.

KIRIN *(goes up to Shipuchin, in a low voice).* Let me call the hall-porter, sir, and have her thrown out on her backside. This is impossible!

SHIPUCHIN *(alarmed).* No, no! She'll scream the place down. There are lots of private apartments in this building.

MERCHUTKINA. Your Excellency!

KIRIN *(on the verge of tears).* But I've got to get on with the report! I won't finish it in time! *(Goes back to his desk.)* I can't stand it!

MERCHUTKINA. When can I have the money, your Excellency? I need it right away.

SHIPUCHIN *(angrily, aside).* What a dreadful old bag! *(To her, gently.)* I've already told you, Madam. This is a bank, a private, commercial concern...

MERCHUTKINA. Do me a kindness, your Excellency, befriend a poor woman who's all alone in the world. If a medical certificate's not enough, I can get a chitty from the police station as well. Tell them to pay me the money.

Shipuchin gives a loud groan

TATIANA *(to Merchutkina).* They've told you, old woman. You're being a nuisance. What a funny old thing you are.

MERCHUTKINA. Oh, Missus, you beautiful lady, I've got no one to help me. I get no pleasure from eating or

drinking any more. Didn't even enjoy my cup of coffee this morning.

SHIPUCHIN *(at the end of his tether, to Merchutkina).* How much do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Twenty-four roubles, thirty-six kopecks.

SHIPUCHIN. Very well! *(Takes a twenty-five rouble note out of his wallet and gives it to her.)* Here's twenty-five roubles. Take it and go away.

Kirin coughs angrily

MERCHUTKINA. Oh, thanking you kindly, Your Excellency! *(Puts the money away.)*

TATIANA *(sits down next to her husband).* It's time I was going home. *(Looks at her watch.)* But I haven't finished yet. It won't take a minute, then I'll be off. Such goings-on there were! So we went to a party at the Berezhnitskys that evening. It wasn't bad, quite fun, but nothing special. Katya's young man, Grendilevsky, was there too, of course. Well, I'd already had a talk with Katya. I'd cried a bit and used my influence with her, so she had it out with Grendilevsky at the party and refused him. I thought everything had turned out beautifully: I had set Mother's mind at rest, and rescued Katya, so now I could relax and enjoy myself. Then what do you think! Just before dinner Katya and I were walking in the garden, when suddenly... *(Agitatedly.)* Suddenly we heard a shot. I can't talk about it calmly! *(Fans herself with her kerchief.)* Oh, dear!

Shipuchin sighs

TATIANA *(weeping).* We ran into the summer-house and there ... on the floor ... lay poor Grendilevsky ... with a pistol in his hand.

SHIPUCHIN. I can't stand this any longer! I can't stand it! *(To Merchutkina.)* What else do you want?

MERCHUTKINA. Could my husband have his job back, Your Excellency?

TATIANA *(weeping).* He'd shot himself right in the heart. Right here. Katya fainted, the poor thing. And he was awfully frightened too, just lay and ... and asked us to fetch the doctor. The doctor came quickly and ... and saved the unfortunate young man...

MERCHUTKINA. Could my husband have his job back, Your Excellency?

SHIPUCHIN. I can't stand it! *(With tears in his eyes.)* I can't stand any more of it! *(Stretches out his hands in despair to Kirin.)* Get her out of here!

KIRIN *(going up to Tatiana).* Out you go!

SHIPUCHIN. Not her! The other one... That awful creature... *(Pointing to Merchutkina).* That one!

KIRIN *(not understanding him, to Tatiana).* Out you go! *(Stamping his foot.)* Get out!

TATIANA. What? How dare you! Have you gone mad?

SHIPUCHIN. This is terrible. What an unhappy man I am! Get rid of her! Make her go away!

KIRIN *(to Tatiana).* Out! Or I'll cripple you for life! Mash you into little pieces! I can't answer for my actions!

TATIANA *(runs away, with him chasing after her).* How dare you! You scoundrel. *(Shouts.)* Andrei! Help! Andrei! *(Screeches.)*

SHIPUCHIN *(running after them).* Stop it! I beg you! Be quiet! Think of my reputation!

KIRIN *(chasing after Merchutkina).* Get out of here! Catch her! Give her what-for! Make mincemeat of her!

SHIPUCHIN *(shouting).* Stop it! I beg you! I beseech you!

MERCHUTKINA. Mercy me ... Mercy me ... *(Screeches.)* Mercy me!

TATIANA *(shouting).* Help! Help! Oh, I feel ill! *(Jumps onto a chair, then collapses on the sofa, moaning as if she were fainting.)*

KIRIN *(chasing after Merchutkina).* Beat her! Bash her! Conk her!

MERCHUTKINA. Mercy me! Everything's going black! Oh! *(Faints into Shipuchin's arms.)*

A knock at the door and a voice off-stage saying "The deputation"

SHIPUCHIN. Deputation ... reputation ... occupation...

KIRIN *(stamping his foot).* Get out, blast you! *(Rolls up his sleeves.)* Let me get my hands on her! I can't answer for my actions!

Enter a deputation of five men, all in dress-coats. One is holding the address in a velvet cover, another the silver decanter. The bank clerks are looking through the door. Tatiana is lying on the sofa and Mrs Merchutkina is in Shipuchin's arms, both women moaning quietly

SHAREHOLDER *(reads out loudly).* Dear and deeply respected Mr Shipuchin. Casting a retrospective glance at the past of our financial establishment and following in our mind's eye the history of its gradual development, we are gratified in the extreme. True, in the early days of its existence the limited scope of the basic capital, the absence of any serious financial operations, and also the indefinite nature of its aims brought Hamlet's question very much to the fore: "To be or not to be?" At one time there were even suggestions that the bank should be closed. But then you came to take charge of our establishment. Your knowledge, energy and innate tact are responsible for the extraordinary success and remarkable prosperity. The bank's reputation ... *(coughs)* ... the bank's reputation...

Mrs Merchutkina groans

TATIANA *(groans).* Water! Water!

SHAREHOLDER *(continues).* The bank's reputation *(coughs)* has been raised so high by you that our

establishment can today compete with the best rival concerns abroad...

SHIPUCHIN. Deputation ... reputation ... occupation... Two friends one evening they did walk and had a very earnest talk... Oh, do not say your youth is lost, tormented by my jealousy.

SHAREHOLDER *(continues, embarrassedly).* And then, as we cast an objective glance at the present, dear and deeply respected Mr Shipuchin... *(lowers his voice).* Perhaps we had better come back later... Better come back later...

They go out in confusion

Curtain

1891

THE SEAGULL

A comedy in four acts

CHARACTERS

IRINA ARKADINA, an actress
KOSTYA TREPLEV, her son
PYOTR SORIN, her brother
NINA ZARECHNAYA, the daughter of a wealthy landowner
ILYA SHAMRAYEV, a retired army lieutenant who manages Sorin's estate
POLINA, his wife
MASHA, his daughter
BORIS TRIGORIN, a writer
YEVGENY DORN, a doctor
SEMYON MEDVEDENKO, a schoolmaster
YAKOV, a workman
COOK
MAID

The action takes place in Sorin's country-house. There is an interval of two years between the third and fourth acts.

ACT ONE

The grounds on Sorin's estate. A broad avenue leading across the park to a lake. A makeshift stage for amateur theatricals has been erected across the avenue, obscuring the view of the lake. There

are bushes on either side of the stage, a few chairs and a small table

The sun has just set. Yakov and some other workmen are on the makeshift stage behind the curtain, hammering and coughing. Masha and Medvedenko enter left, returning from a walk

MEDVEDENKO. Why do you always wear black?

MASHA. I'm in mourning for my life. I'm unhappy.

MEDVEDENKO. But why? *(Musingly.)* I can't understand it. You're in good health. Your father may not be rich, but he's fairly well off. I have a much harder life than you. I earn a miserable twenty-three roubles a month, and that's before my superannuation is deducted. But I don't go around in mourning.

They sit down

MASHA. It's not a question of money. People can be poor and still be happy.

MEDVEDENKO. In theory they can, but in practice it works out like this. There's me, my mother, my two sisters and my young brother, living on twenty-three roubles a month. We have to eat and drink, don't we? And what about tea and sugar? And tobacco? You just try and make ends meet.

MASHA *(looking round at the stage).* The play will begin soon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes. It's been written by Kostya and Nina's going to act in it. They're in love with each other, and today their souls will entwine in the urge to mould the same artistic image. But there are no points of contact for your soul and mine. I love you. I can't stay at home because I miss you so much. Each day I walk four miles here and four miles back and all I get from you is indifferentism. That's only to be expected, of course. I haven't any money, and ours is a large family. Who'd want to marry a man who hasn't enough to eat?

MASHA. That's rubbish. *(Takes a pinch of snuff.)* I'm touched by your affection, but I can't return it and that's that. *(Offers him the snuff-box.)* Have some.

MEDVEDENKO. No, thank you. *(Pause.)*

MASHA. How close it is. There'll probably be a storm tonight. You're always philosophising or going on about money. You believe there's nothing worse than being poor, but I think it's a thousand times easier to walk round in rags and tatters and beg for your living than... But never mind, you wouldn't understand...

Sorin and Kostya enter right

SORIN *(leaning on his walking stick).* I never feel at home in the country and I'll never get used to living here now, of course. I went to bed at ten yesterday and woke up this morning at nine feeling as if my brains had got stuck to my skull or something, with all that sleeping. *(Laughs.)* And after lunch I dropped off again, so now I'm really done for. It's a bit of a nightmare, eh, what?

KOSTYA. Yes, you ought to live in the town. *(Catches sight of Masha and Medvedenko.)* You'll be called when it's about to begin, everybody, but you mustn't stay here now. Would you mind going away, please.

SORIN *(to Masha).* Do ask your father to let the dog off its chain. It does howl so. My sister had another sleepless night.

MASHA. Ask him yourself. I'm not going to. Spare me that, please. *(To Medvedenko.)* Shall we go?

MEDVEDENKO *(to Kostya).* You will send someone to tell us when it's going to begin, won't you? *(Exit both.)*

SORIN. That means the dog will howl all night long again. Well, as I was saying. I've never enjoyed living in the country. I used to take a month's leave and come down here for a good rest and all that, then things would start going wrong and I'd want to be off as soon as I'd arrived. *(Laughs.)* I was always happy to leave. But now I've

retired and I don't know what to do with myself, er, what? Got to put up with it, whether I like it or not.

YAKOV *(to Kostya).* We're going for a swim, sir.

KOSTYA. Alright, but make sure you're back in ten minutes. *(Looks at his watch.)* We're due to begin soon.

YAKOV. Yes, sir. *(Exit.)*

KOSTYA *(looking round the stage).* There's a theatre for you! Just a curtain, two wings, and then open space. Not a bit of scenery. A view straight onto the lake and the far horizon. We'll raise the curtain at half past eight exactly, when the moon rises.

SORIN. Splendid.

KOSTYA. If Nina is late, the whole effect will be spoiled, of course. She should be here already. Her father and stepmother keep such a close eye on her, it's as hard for her to slip away as if she were in prison. *(Straightens his uncle's tie.)* Your hair and beard are a mess. Shouldn't you get them trimmed?

SORIN *(combing his beard).* That's the tragedy of my life. I've always looked as if I drank like a fish, even in my young days. The women never went for me. *(Sits down.)* Why is my sister in such a bad mood?

KOSTYA. Why? She's bored. *(Sits down beside him.)* She's jealous. She's already got it in for me, and the performance, and my play, because Nina's acting in it and not her. She doesn't know the play, but she already hates it.

SORIN *(laughing).* Your're imagining things, really.

KOSTYA. She's annoyed, because Nina will be applauded on this tiny stage, and not her. *(Looks at his watch.)* She's a psychological oddity, my mother. She's gifted, intelligent, capable of weeping over a book, reciting the whole of Nekrasov by heart and looking after the sick like an angel; but just try praising Duse in front of her. Oh, no! You must praise her alone, write about her only, or rave about her superb acting in *La Dame aux camélias* or

The Elixir of Life. But since there's none of that heady liquor here, in the country, she's bored and irritable, and we're all her enemies, we're all to blame. She's superstitious, too, afraid of three candles and the number thirteen. And she's mean. I know for a fact that she's got seventy thousand in a bank in Odessa. But ask her for a loan and she'll burst into tears.

SORIN. You've got it into your head that your mother doesn't like your play, so you're all upset. Calm down, lad. Your mother adores you.

KOSTYA *(picking the petals off a flower).* She loves me—she loves me not. Loves me. Loves me not. *(Laughs.)* See, my mother loves me not. And why should she? She wants to enjoy herself, to have love affairs and wear gay, frilly blouses. But I'm twenty-five and a constant reminder to her that she's not young anymore. She's thirty-two when I'm not around and forty-three when I am, and she hates me for it. And she knows I don't think much of the theatre. She loves the theatre. She thinks she is serving humanity, serving the sacred cause of art, but to my mind the theatre of today is nothing but stale convention. When the curtain goes up under artificial light, on a room with three walls, and these great geniuses, these high priests of the sacred art, show people eating, drinking, falling in love and wearing the latest fashions; when they try to squeeze a moral out of the tritest scenes and phrases, a wretched little moral that's easy to grasp and handy about the house; when they dish up with the same old thing, over and over again, in a thousand variations—I run away as fast as I can, just like Maupassant ran away in disgust from the Eiffel Tower because it was so vulgar.

SORIN. We can't do without the theatre.

KOSTYA. New forms are what we need. New forms, and if there aren't any, we'd be better off without anything at all. *(Looks at his watch.)* I love my mother, very much; but she leads such a stupid life, always running around with

that writer of hers, and her name is constantly bandied about in the papers. I find it so tiresome. Sometimes I get selfish, I'm only human after all. Then I wish that my mother wasn't a famous actress at all, and imagine I should be happier if she were just an ordinary woman. Can you think of a more hopeless and ridiculous situation, Uncle? She would have a room full of visitors, all celebrities, stage people and writers, and I would be the only person there who was a nobody, tolerated only because I was her son. Who am I? What am I? I left university in my third year due to circumstances beyond our control, as they say, without any special gifts or a penny of my own. My papers describe me as lower middle class, born in Kiev. My father was also from Kiev, lower middle class, although he was a famous actor. Anyway, when all these stage people and writers in her drawing-room graciously bestowed their attention on me, I felt their glances were measuring my insignificance, I guessed at what they were thinking and was terribly humiliated...

SORIN. By the way, what sort of fellow is that writer? I can't make him out. Never says a word.

KOSTYA. He's intelligent, unaffected, and a bit melancholic. A very decent chap. He's still quite a bit off forty, but he's already famous and doing very nicely, thank you. As for his writing, well ... how shall I put it? It's nice and gifted, but after Tolstoy or Zola you don't feel like reading Trigorin.

SORIN. You know, lad, I'm very fond of writers. At one time there were two things I wanted passionately: to get married and to be a writer. But I didn't manage to do either. No. And it must be quite nice to be even a very minor writer, eh, what?

KOSTYA *(listening).* I hear footsteps... *(Hugs his uncle.)* I can't live without her. Even the sound of her footsteps is music. I'm so insanely happy! *(Hurries to meet Nina Zarechnaya.)* My enchantress, my dream...

NINA *(agitatedly).* I'm not late, am I? Of course, I'm not...

KOSTYA *(kissing her hands).* No, no, no!

NINA. I've been worried all day, terrified. I was afraid father wouldn't let me come. But then he went out with my stepmother. There was a red sky and the moon was just rising. I drove the horse as hard as I could. *(Laughs.)* But I'm so glad to be here. *(Shakes hands warmly with Sorin.)*

SORIN *(laughing).* Looks as though you've been crying, my dear. Now then! We can't have that.

NINA. Yes, I have. See how out of breath I am. I have to leave in half an hour, so we must hurry. And please don't try to make me stay longer. Father doesn't know I'm here.

KOSTYA. Yes, it really is time we started. Someone must go and get the others.

SORIN. I'll go. Straightaway. *(Exit right singing.)* "Two grenadiers to France did march"... *(Looks round.)* Once I started singing like that and the public prosecutor, one of my colleagues, said: "You've got a powerful voice there. Sorin." Then he thought for a bit and added: "But it's a pretty awful one, too." *(Exit laughing.)*

NINA. My father and his wife won't let me come here. They say you're all a lot of Bohemians. They're afraid I'll go on the stage. But I feel drawn to the lake, like a seagull. My thoughts are all of you. *(Looks round.)*

KOSTYA. We're alone.

NINA. I think there's someone over there...

KOSTYA. No, there isn't. *(A kiss.)*

NINA. What sort of tree is that?

KOSTYA. An elm.

NINA. Why is it so dark?

KOSTYA. It's evening, everything gets dark then. Please don't leave early, I beg you.

NINA. I must.

KOSTYA. Then what if I come to your place, Nina?

I'll stand in the garden all night gazing at your window.

NINA. You mustn't. The night-watchman would notice you. Tresor isn't used to you yet. He'd bark.

KOSTYA. I love you.

NINA. Shush.

KOSTYA *(hearing footsteps).* Who's that? Is it you, Yakov?

YAKOV *(behind the stage).* Yes, sir.

KOSTYA. Everyone in their places. It's time to start. Is the moon rising?

YAKOV. Yes, sir.

KOSTYA. Have you got the meths? And the sulphur? There must be a smell of sulphur when the red eyes light up. *(To Nina.)* You can go now, everything's ready for you there. Are you nervous?

NINA. Yes, very. Your mother's alright. I'm not afraid of her. But Trigorin's here. I feel so terrified and ashamed of acting in front of him ... a famous writer. Is he young?

KOSTYA. Yes.

NINA. What marvellous stories he writes.

KOSTYA *(coldly).* I wouldn't know. I haven't read them.

NINA. It's hard acting in your play. There are no real live people in it.

KOSTYA. Real live people! We have to show life as we see it in our dreams, not as it is but as it ought to be.

NINA. There's so little action in it. It's all monologue. And I think a play should always have some love in it.

They both go off-stage

Enter Polina and Dorn

POLINA. It's getting damp. Do go back and put your galoshes on.

DORN. I'm too hot.

POLINA. You don't look after yourself properly. It's sheer obstinacy. You're a doctor and you know perfectly

well that damp air is bad for you, but you want to make me worry. You spent the whole evening on the terrace yesterday on purpose.

DORN *(sings).* "Oh do not say your youth was ruined forever."

POLINA. You were so carried away by your conversation with Irina Arkadina that you didn't notice the cold. You think she's attractive, don't you? Admit it.

DORN. I'm fifty-five.

POLINA. So what? That's not old for a man. You're still in fine form and women still find you attractive.

DORN. Well then?

POLINA. You're all dying to kiss the ground that actress treads on. All of you!

DORN *(sings).* "Once more I stand before you..." It's in the nature of things for people to admire actors and actresses and to treat them differently from tradesmen, say. It's idealism.

POLINA. The ladies were always falling in love with you and running after you. Was that idealism too?

DORN *(shrugging his shoulders).* What of it? There was a lot of good in what they felt for me. They loved me mainly because I was a good doctor. Ten or fifteen years ago I was the only decent obstetrician in the whole district, remember. And what's more, I've always been a fairly honest person.

POLINA *(grasping his hand).* My dearest!

DORN. Shush. They're coming.

Enter Irina Arkadina with her arm through Sorin's, Trigorin, Shamrayev, Medvedenko and Masha

SHAMRAYEV. She was magnificent at the Poltava Fair in 1873. Absolutely splendid. Marvellous acting. Do any of you happen to know what became of that comic actor Chadin, Pavel Chadin? He was excellent as Rasp-

luyev, even better than Sadovsky. I'll swear to it, dear lady. What's become of him now?

ARKADINA. You keep asking me about these ancient old fogies. How should I know! *(Sits down.)*

SHAMRAYEV *(sighing).* Old Pavel Chadin! You don't get actors like him these days. The theatre's not what it used to be, dear lady. It was fine oak trees then, but now it's only old stumps.

DORN. It's true there aren't many really great people on the stage today, but the average actor has reached a far higher level.

SHAMRAYEV. I can't agree. Still, it's a matter of taste. *De gustibus aut bene, aut nihil.*

Kostya enters from behind the stage

ARKADINA *(to her son).* When's it going to begin, dear boy?

KOSTYA. In a minute. Please try to be patient.

ARKADINA *(reciting from Hamlet).*

Oh, Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul;
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct.

KOSTYA *(from Hamlet).*

And let me wring thy heart, for so I shall,
If it be made of penetrable stuff.

A horn sounds behind the stage

Ladies and gentlemen. The play is about to begin. Your attention please! *(Pause.)* I'll start now. *(Bangs with a stick and recites loudly.)* O venerable shades of yore, who hover o'er this lake by night, lull us to sleep and send us dreams of what will be two hundred thousand years from now!

SORIN. Two hundred thousand years from now there will be nothing.

KOSTYA. Then let them show us that nothing.

ARKADINA. Yes, let them. We're lulled to sleep alright.

The curtain rises, revealing the view of the lake; the moon on the horizon is reflected in the water; Nina Zarechnaya, all in white, is sitting on a large boulder

NINA. Men, lions, eagles and partridges, the antlered deer, geese, spiders, the silent fish inhabiting the deep, the starfish and those creatures which the eye could not see—in short, all living things, have completed their sad cycle and expired. For many thousands of years the earth has not borne a single living creature, and this poor moon now lights in vain its lantern. The cranes no longer awake with a cry in the meadows, and the cockchafers are not to be heard in the lime groves. It is cold, cold, cold. It is empty, empty, empty. It's fearful, fearful, fearful. *(Pause.)* The bodies of all living things have turned to dust. Eternal matter has transformed them into rocks, water and clouds, and all their souls have merged into one. And I, I am the soul of the whole world. Within me lie the souls of Alexander the Great, Caesar, Shakespeare, Napoleon, and the vilest leech. Within me human minds have merged with animal instincts, and I remember all, all, all, and live each life within me anew. *(Will-o'the-wisps appear.)*

ARKADINA *(in a low voice).* This is something in the decadent line.

KOSTYA *(imploring reproachfully).* Mother!

NINA. I am alone. Once every hundred years I open my mouth to speak, and my voice rings desolate in the void, and no one hears it... You too, pale lights, hear me not... Born of the stagnant marsh before daybreak, you wander listlessly till dawn, yet without thought, without will, without the quivering of life. Fearing lest life should emerge in you, the Devil, father of Eternal Matter, produces each moment a change of atoms in you, as in the

rocks and water, and you are in constant flux. The spirit alone remains constant and immutable in the universe.

Pause

Like a captive cast into a deep and empty well, I know not where I am nor what awaits me. I only know that I am destined to conquer in a fierce and bitter battle with the Devil, the principle of material force. Then matter and spirit shall blend in perfect harmony and the Kingdom of Cosmic Freedom shall arise. But this will come to pass only when the moon, and bright Sirius, and the earth shall turn to dust slowly over many, many millennia... And until then—horror, horror, horror...

Pause; two red eyes appear against the background of the lake

Lo, my powerful adversary, the Devil, approaches. I see his fearsome, crimson eyes...

ARKADINA. There's a smell of sulphur. Is that right?

KOSTYA. Yes.

ARKADINA *(laughing).* There's an effect for you.

KOSTYA. Mother!

NINA. He is bored without man...

POLINA *(to Dorn).* You've taken your hat off. Put it on again, or you'll catch cold.

ARKADINA. The doctor's taken off his hat to the Devil, the father of eternal matter.

KOSTYA *(loudly, in a rage).* The play's over. Stop! Curtain!

ARKADINA. What are you angry about?

KOSTYA. Stop! Curtain! Bring down the curtain! *(Stamping.)* Curtain!

The curtain falls

I'm sorry! I forgot that only a select few are allowed to write plays and act on the stage. I've interfered with their

monopoly. I... I... *(Is about to say something else, but gives a hopeless wave of the hand and goes off left.)*

ARKADINA. What's the matter with him?

SORIN. Irina, my dear, you really shouldn't hurt a young man's pride like that.

ARKADINA. But what did I say to him?

SORIN. You offended him.

ARKADINA. He told us himself that it was a joke, so I treated the play like a joke.

SORIN. All the same, though...

ARKADINA. But now it turns out that he has written a *magnum opus*! How do you like that! So he put on this performance and sprayed us all with sulphur for our edification, not as a joke. He wanted to show us how to write and how to act. This is becoming tedious. These constant jibes and digs at me, if you please! They'd be enough to infuriate anyone! He's a wilful conceited boy.

SORIN. He wanted to please you.

ARKADINA. Is that so? Then why didn't he choose an ordinary play, instead of making us listen to this decadent rubbish. I'm quite prepared to listen to rubbish as well, for a joke, but this claims to introduce new forms, a new era in art. If you ask me, what we're dealing with here is bad temper, not new art forms.

TRIGORIN. Everyone writes what he wants and what he can.

ARKADINA. Let him write what he wants and what he can, as long as he leaves me alone.

DORN. Thou art angry, Jupiter...

ARKADINA. I'm not Jupiter, I'm a woman. *(Lights a cigarette.)* And I'm not angry. I'm just annoyed that a young man should spend his time in such a tiresome way. I didn't want to offend him.

MEDVEDENKO. There are no grounds for distinguishing between spirit and matter, because spirit may be all the material atoms put together. *(Animatedly, to Trigorin.)* You

know what, somebody ought to write a play about the life of a schoolmaster. It's a hard one, I can tell you.

ARKADINA. Quite so, but let's not talk any more about plays or atoms. It's such a heavenly evening! Listen, everyone. Can you hear singing? *(Listens.)* How delightful!

POLINA. It's on the other side of the lake. *(Pause.)*

ARKADINA *(to Trigorin).* Sit down beside me. Ten or fifteen years ago there was music and singing here by the lake almost every night. There are six estates on its shores. I remember the laughter, the noise, the shooting—and all the love affairs. The *jeune premier* and idol on all those estates was—allow me to introduce him—(nodding towards Dorn) Doctor Yevgeny Dorn. He's charming enough now, but in those days he was quite irresistible. Oh dear, my conscience is starting to trouble me. Why did I hurt my poor boy? I'm so worried. *(Loudly.)* Kostya, darling!

MASHA. I'll go and look for him.

ARKADINA. Yes, be an angel.

MASHA *(walking off left).* Kostya! Halloo! *(Exit.)*

NINA *(emerging from behind the stage).* It looks as though we're not going to continue, so I'd better come out. Good evening, everybody. *(Kisses Arkadina and Polina.)*

SORIN. Bravo! Bravo!

ARKADINA. Bravo! Bravo! You were superb. With your looks and that divine voice it's a sin to bury yourself in the country. You're bound to have talent. You really ought to go on the stage, you know.

NINA. Oh, it's my one dream! *(Sighs.)* But it will never come true.

ARKADINA. Who knows? Now allow me to introduce Boris Trigorin to you.

NINA. Oh, I'm so delighted... *(Confused.)* I always read your books...

ARKADINA *(sitting her down beside them).* Don't be shy, my dear. He's a celebrity, but he's simple enough at heart. Look, he's embarrassed too.

SORIN. I assume we can have the curtain raised now. It's a bit eery like that.

SHAMRAYEV *(loudly).* Yakov, get the curtain up, will you!

The curtain goes up

NINA *(to Trigorin).* It's a strange play, isn't it?

TRIGORIN. I didn't understand a word. But I enjoyed watching it. You acted so sincerely. And the set was splendid. *(Pause.)* There must be a lot of fish in this lake.

NINA. Yes.

TRIGORIN. I'm very fond of fishing. There's nothing I enjoy more than sitting on a bank in the late afternoon and watching a float.

NINA. I should have thought that for anyone who has experienced the joy of creative work, no other pleasures could exist.

ARKADINA *(laughing).* Don't talk to him like that. He's always at a loss when people say pretty things to him.

SHAMRAYEV. I remember the great Silva singing lower C one night at the Bolshoi in Moscow. As luck would have it, the bass from our parish church was in the gallery. You can imagine our amazement when we suddenly heard "Bravo, Silva!" a whole octave lower from up there. Like this *(sings in a low bass)* "Bravo, Silva!" There was a deathly hush in the audience. *(Pause.)*

DORN. Listen to the silence.

NINA. It's time I went. Good-bye.

ARKADINA. Where? It's so early. We won't let you go yet.

NINA. My father is waiting for me.

ARKADINA. What a man, really... *(They embrace.)* Oh well, it can't be helped. But it's a pity to let you go.

NINA. If only you knew how hard it is for me to go.

ARKADINA. Someone should see you home, my sweet.

NINA *(frightened).* Oh, no!

SORIN *(imploring her).* Do stay!

NINA. I can't.

SORIN. Stay for one more hour and that's all. Really...

NINA *(after a moment's thought, tearfully).* I mustn't! *(Shakes hands with him and goes out quickly.)*

ARKADINA. She's been very unlucky, you know. They say her late mother left the whole of her vast fortune to her husband, everything down to the last kopeck. And now the girl has nothing, because her father has already made a will leaving everything to his second wife. It's disgraceful.

DORN. Yes, her dear father is a scoundrel of the first order, to give him his due.

SORIN *(rubbing his hands to warm them).* Let's go inside, too, everybody. It's getting damp. My legs are aching.

ARKADINA. They're like wooden sticks, they can hardly walk. Alright, come along, poor old man. *(Takes his arm.)*

SHAMRAYEV *(offering his arm to his wife).* Madam?

SORIN. I can hear that dog howling again. *(To Shamrayev.)* Please tell them to let it off the chain.

SHAMRAYEV. I can't do that. I'm afraid of thieves breaking into the barn. I've got millet in there. *(To Medvedenko who is walking next to him.)* Yes! "Bravo, Silva", a whole octave lower. And he was just a simple church chorister, not a great singer.

MEDVEDENKO. How much does a church chorister earn?

Exit everyone except Dorn

DORN *(alone).* I don't know. Perhaps I'm just stupid or a bit mad, but I liked the play. It's got something. When that girl was talking about loneliness and when Satan's red

eyes appeared, my hands were shaking with emotion. It was fresh and unaffected. That looks like him now. I want to tell him something nice about it.

KOSTYA *(entering).* There's no one left.

DORN. I'm here.

KOSTYA, Masha's been hunting for me all over the park, the wretched creature.

DORN. I enjoyed your play tremendously, Kostya. It's rather strange and I did not hear the end, but it impressed me very much. You've got talent. You must go on writing.

Kostya shakes his hand warmly and embraces him impulsively

Goodness, how overwrought you are. There are tears in your eyes. What I want to say is this. You took your subject from the sphere of abstract ideas. That was quite right, because a work of art must express an important idea. Only serious things can be beautiful. How pale you are!

KOSTYA. So you think I ought to carry on?

DORN. Yes... But you must only portray things that are important and eternal. I've led a full life, you know, and I've been discriminating. I'm quite content, but if I were to feel the ecstasy that artists experience while creating, I think I would despise my material frame and everything that goes with it and soar away higher and higher from the earth.

KOSTYA. Excuse me, but where is Nina?

DORN. And remember this too. Every work of art must have a clear and definite idea. You must know why you are writing. Otherwise, if you walk along this picturesque path without a definite aim, you'll get lost and your talent will be the ruin of you.

KOSTYA *(impatiently).* Where is Nina?

DORN. She's gone home.

KOSTYA *(in despair).* What am I to do? I want to see her. I must see her. I'll go after her...

Enter Masha

DORN *(to Kostya).* Calm down, my friend.

KOSTYA. I will go, I must go.

MASHA. Go into the house, Kostya. Your mother's waiting for you. She's worried.

KOSTYA. Tell her I've gone. And I beg you, all of you—leave me alone and don't follow me around.

DORN. Come now, my dear boy. That's not right. You can't behave like that.

KOSTYA *(tearfully).* Good-bye, Doctor. And thank you... *(Exit.)*

DORN *(sighing).* Youth! Youth!

MASHA. That's what people always say when they can't think of anything better. *(Takes a pinch of snuff.)*

DORN *(takes the snuff-box away from her and throws it into the bushes).* Filthy stuff! *(Pause.)* Someone's playing the piano. We'd better go indoors.

MASHA. Wait a moment.

DORN. What is it?

MASHA. I want to tell you again. I want to talk to you. *(Agitatedly.)* I don't love my father, but I have some affection for you. For some reason, I feel instinctively that I can trust you. Please help me. Help me, or else I'll do something silly. I'll make a mess of my life and ruin it. I can't go on like this...

DORN. What is it? How can I help?

MASHA. I'm suffering. Nobody knows how I'm suffering. *(Rests her head on his chest, softly.)* I love Kostya.

DORN. How nervy everyone is! And how much love there is about! It's that magical lake! *(Gently.)* But what can I do, my child? What can I do?

Curtain

ACT TWO

A croquet lawn. In the background on the right is a house with a large terrace. On the left is the lake sparkling with a reflection of sunlight. Flower-beds. It is midday and hot. Arkadina, Dorn and Masha are sitting on a bench in the shade of an old lime tree near the lawn. Dorn has an open book on his lap

ARKADINA *(to Masha).* Let's get up.

They both rise

Now stand next to me. You are twenty-two and I'm almost twice that. Which of us looks the younger, Doctor?

DORN. You, of course.

ARKADINA. There you are. And why is that? Because I work, I feel, I'm always busy. But you just mooch around in the same old place. You don't really live at all. My rule is never look into the future. I never think about old age or death. What will be, will be.

MASHA. And I feel as if I had been born long, long ago, and I'm dragging my life behind me like an endless train. Often I don't have the slightest desire to go on living. *(Sits down.)* That's all a lot of rubbish, of course. I ought to pull myself together.

DORN *(sings quietly).* "Tell her, my flowers"...

ARKADINA. What is more, I'm as meticulous about my appearance as an Englishman. I keep a tight rein on myself, as they say, my dear. My dress and hair are always impeccable. Would I ever dream of going out of the house, even into the garden, in a dressing gown or without doing my hair? Certainly not. That's how I've kept so young-looking, by never being sloppy and letting myself go, like some people. *(Walks up and down the lawn, her hands on her hips.)* There see—as trim as can be. I could play a girl of fifteen.

DORN. Well, all the same, I'll go on. *(Picks up the book.)* We've got up to the corn merchant and the rats...

ARKADINA. Yes, the rats. Read us some more. *(Sits down.)* No, give me the book and I'll read instead. It's my turn. *(Takes the book and looks for the place.)* The rats... Ah, here it is. *(Reads.)* "And of course it is as dangerous for society people to pamper writers as it is for corn merchants to breed rats in their granaries. Yet they are the object of great attention. Thus, when a woman has chosen a writer whom she wishes to captivate, she besieges him with compliments, flattery and favours..." Well, that may be the French way, but there's nothing like that here, no plans of action. With us a woman usually falls head over heels in love with a writer before she decides to captivate him. No need to look far. Take me and Trigorin, for example.

Sorin enters, leaning on his walking stick, with Nina beside him; Medvedenko follows wheeling a bath-chair

SORIN *(fondly, as to a child).* Really? So we've had a nice surprise, have we? We're feeling happy today, are we? *(To his sister.)* What a nice surprise we've had! Father and stepmother have gone off to Tver, and now we are free for the next three days.

NINA *(sits down beside Arkadina and embraces her).* I'm so happy! Now I belong to you.

SORIN *(sitting down in his bath-chair).* She looks so pretty today.

ARKADINA. Very elegant and charming. What a clever girl you are. *(Kisses Nina.)* But we mustn't praise you too much or it will bring bad luck. Where is Mr Trigorin?

NINA. He's fishing by the bathing hut.

ARKADINA. I can't understand why he doesn't get tired of it. *(Prepares to continue reading.)*

NINA. What is that?

ARKADINA. Maupassant's *Sur l'eau,* my pet. *(Reads a few lines to herself.)* The next bit is boring and not true

anyway. *(Closes the book.)* I'm so worried. Tell me, what's the matter with my son? Why is he so moody and bad-tempered? He spends whole days down by the lake and I hardly ever see him.

MASHA. He's unhappy. *(To Nina, timidly.)* Would you recite us something from his play.

NINA *(shrugging).* Do you really want me to? It's so dull.

MASHA *(trying to restrain her rapture).* When he reads, his eyes flash and his face turns pale. He has the most beautiful, sad voice and the manner of a poet.

Sorin snores

DORN. Sweet dreams.

ARKADINA. Pyotr!

SORIN. Eh?

ARKADINA. Were you asleep?

SORIN. Certainly not.

Pause

ARKADINA. You're not getting any medical attention, Pyotr. That's bad.

SORIN. I'd be glad to have some medicine, but the doctor won't give me any.

DORN. Medicine at the age of sixty!

SORIN. You still want to go on living at the age of sixty.

DORN *(irritably).* Well, take valerian drops then.

ARKADINA. I think it would do him good to go to a spa.

DORN. Why not? Let him go, if he likes. Or not go, if he doesn't.

ARKADINA. What are we supposed to make of that?

DORN. Nothing at all. It's all perfectly clear.

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Mr Sorin should give up smoking.

SORIN. Nonsense.

DORN. No, it's not nonsense. Wine and tobacco make you lose your personality. After a cigar or a glass of vodka you're no longer Pyotr Sorin, but Pyotr Sorin plus somebody else. Your real self gets lost and you think of yourself in the third person, as "he".

SORIN *(laughing).* It's all very well for you to talk. You've lived your life to the full. But what about me? I worked for twenty-eight years in the Department of Justice, but I've never really lived, never experienced anything, eh, what? So naturally enough I want to feel that I'm living. You don't care. You've your fill, that's why you tend to be philosophical. But I want to live, so I drink sherry at dinner and smoke cigars and all that. There you are.

DORN. Life is something to be taken seriously. To ask for treatment at the age of sixty and complain that you didn't enjoy yourself enough when you were young is downright irresponsible, begging your pardon.

MASHA *(getting up).* It must be about time for lunch. *(Walks off languidly and limply).* My leg's got pins and needles. *(Exit.)*

DORN. She's gone to knock back a couple of drinks before lunch.

SORIN. The poor girl's so unhappy.

DORN. Nonsense, sir.

SORIN. You talk like a man who's had his fill of life.

ARKADINA. Ah, what could be more boring than this delightful country boredom! The heat, the quiet, the idleness and the philosophising. It's nice being here with you, my friends, pleasant listening to you ... but how much nicer to be learning a part in a hotel room.

NINA *(rapturously).* Oh, yes! How I understand you.

SORIN. Of course it's better in town. You sit in your room, and the footman doesn't let anyone in unannounced, and there's a telephone ... and cabs outside and all that.

DORN *(sings).* "Tell her, my flowers..."

Enter Shamrayev followed by Polina

SHAMRAYEV. Here they are. Good morning, everybody! *(Kisses Arkadina's hand, then Nina's.)* Delighted to see you looking so well. *(To Arkadina.)* My wife tells me that you and she are thinking of going to town today. Is that correct?

ARKADINA. Yes.

SHAMRAYEV. Hm. That's splendid, but how will you get there, dear lady? We're bringing in the rye today, and all the men are busy. What horses will you take, begging your pardon?

ARKADINA. What horses? How on earth should I know what horses?

SORIN. But we have carriage horses.

SHAMRAYEV *(angrily).* Carriage horses? And where am I going to get the harness for them? Tell me that! It's incredible! It's quite beyond me! My dear lady! Forgive me. I have the greatest admiration for your talent and would gladly sacrifice ten years of my life for you, but I can't let you have any horses!

ARKADINA. But what if I must go? Well, really!

SHAMRAYEV. My dear lady! With respect, you don't know what it means to run an estate.

ARKADINA *(angrily).* The same old story! In that case I'm leaving for Moscow today. Tell them to hire horses for me in the village or I shall walk to the station.

SHAMRAYEV *(angrily).* In that case I resign. Find yourself another manager. *(Exit.)*

ARKADINA. Each summer it's the same thing, each summer I get insulted here! I'll never set foot in the place again! *(Exit left in the direction of the bathing hut. A moment later she is seen entering the house, followed by Trigorin who is carrying fishing rods and a bucket.)*

SORIN *(angrily).* The impudence of it. Well, I never! I've had enough of this. Have all the horses brought here this very minute.

NINA *(to Polina).* Fancy refusing Irina Arkadina, a famous actress! Surely her slightest wish, or even caprice, should be more important than your farming? It's incredible.

POLINA *(in despair).* What can I do? Put yourself in my position. What can I do?

SORIN *(to Nina).* Let's go to my sister. We'll all beg her not to leave, eh? *(Looking in the direction in which Shamrayev went off.)* Insufferable man! Despot!

NINA *(stopping him from getting up).* You stay where you are. We'll take you along. *(She and Medvedenko wheel the bath-chair.)* Oh, how dreadful it all is.

SORIN. Yes, quite dreadful. But he won't go. I'll have a word with him.

They go out leaving only Dorn and Polina

DORN. People are tiresome. Your husband should really be thrown out of here on his ear, but it will end up with that old woman Pyotr Sorin and his sister apologising to him. You'll see.

POLINA. He's even put the carriage horses to work in the fields. Every day there's some sort of squabble like this. If you only knew how it upsets me. I feel quite ill. See, I'm trembling all over. I can't stand his bad manners. *(Imploringly.)* Yevgeny, my dearest, my darling, let me come and live with you. Time is running out, we're not young anymore, at least we could spend what time is left without lying and concealing things. *(Pause.)*

DORN. I'm fifty-five. It's too late for me to change my way of life.

POLINA. I know you're refusing because there are other women in your life apart from me. You can't have

them all living with you. I realise that. Forgive me. I know I'm a nuisance.

Nina appears near the house; she is picking flowers

DORN. No, you're not.

POLINA. I get so jealous. You're a doctor, of course, and you can't help seeing women. I realise that...

DORN *(to Nina, who is approaching them).* What's happening?

NINA. Madam Arkadina is crying and her brother has got an attack of asthma.

DORN *(getting up).* I'd better go and give them both some valerian drops.

NINA *(hands him the flowers).* These are for you.

DORN. *Merci bien. (Walks off to the house.)*

POLINA *(accompanying him).* What pretty flowers! *(By the house, in a hollow voice.)* Let me have those flowers. Come on. *(He hands them over and she tears them to pieces and throws them away. They both go into the house.)*

NINA *(alone).* How strange to see a famous actress crying, and over such a trifle, too. And isn't it funny that a famous writer, who is idolised by the public and written about in all the newspapers, whose portraits are sold everywhere and whose books are translated into foreign languages, should spend all day fishing and be overjoyed at catching two chub. I thought that famous people were proud and inaccessible, that they despised the mob and by the fame and glory of their name somehow took revenge on the mob, which puts high birth and riches above all else. But here they are—crying, fishing, playing cards, laughing and getting angry, like anyone else.

KOSTYA *(comes in hatless, with a gun and a dead seagull).* Are you alone?

NINA. Yes.

Kostya lays the seagull at her feet

What does that mean?

KOSTYA. I did a dreadful thing today—I killed a seagull. I'm laying it at your feet.

NINA. What's the matter with you? *(Picks up the seagull and looks at it.)*

KOSTYA *(after a pause).* I'll soon kill myself in the same way.

NINA. I simply don't recognise you.

KOSTYA. Yes, but only since I stopped recognising you. You've changed towards me, your eyes are cold, and my presence obviously embarrasses you.

NINA. You've grown so irritable lately and keep expressing yourself in incomprehensible symbols. I suppose this seagull is a symbol, too, but I'm afraid I don't understand it... *(Puts the seagull on the bench.)* I'm not clever enough to understand you.

KOSTYA. It all began that evening when my play was such a stupid flop. Women never forgive failure. I've burnt everything, down to the last scrap of paper. If only you knew how miserable I am. Your coldness is terrible. I can't believe it. It's like waking one morning and finding that the lake has dried up or its waters have disappeared into the ground. You say you're not clever enough to understand me. But what is there to understand? My play was a flop, so now you despise my inspiration and regard me as a nobody, like hundreds of others. *(Stamping.)* How well I realise that! It's as if a nail has been driven into my brain. Curse it and the pride that is sucking away at my lifeblood like a serpent. *(He sees Trigorin approach, reading a book.)* Here comes the real genius. Walking like Hamlet and with a book, too. *(Mimicking.)* "Words, words, words!" The sun has not yet reached you, but you are already smiling. Your gaze has melted in its rays. I won't disturb you. *(Goes off quickly.)*

TRIGORIN *(jotting something in a notebook).* Takes snuff and drinks vodka... Always in black... The schoolmaster is in love with her...

NINA. Good morning, Mr Trigorin.

TRIGORIN. Good morning. It turns out that we may have to leave here today unexpectedly. It is unlikely that you and I will ever meet again. A pity I don't get much chance to meet young girls, interesting young girls. I've already forgotten and can't conjure up clearly what it feels like to be eighteen or nineteen. That's why the young girls in my novels and stories are usually rather unconvincing. I would like to change places with you, even if it were just for an hour, to find out what you are thinking, what makes you tick.

NINA. And I should like to change places with you.

TRIGORIN. Why?

NINA. To find out what it feels like to be a famous, gifted writer. What's it like to be a celebrity? What do you feel about being famous?

TRIGORIN. Me? Well, nothing in particular. I've never thought about it. *(Thinking.)* Either you must be exaggerating my fame, or it's something one doesn't feel at all.

NINA. But say you read about yourself in the newspapers?

TRIGORIN. It's nice when they praise you, but you feel upset for a day or two after a bad review.

NINA. What a wonderful world! If only you knew how I envy you! How different people's destinies are! Some people drag out a boring, insignificant existence, all very much alike and all unhappy; but others, like you, for example, and you are one in a million, have been destined to lead interesting, splendid lives full of meaning. How lucky you are!

TRIGORIN. Me? *(Shrugging.)* Hm. You talk about fame, happiness and a splendid, interesting life, but for me all these fine words are like candied fruit which I never eat. You're very young and very sweet.

NINA. Your life is marvellous.

TRIGORIN. What's so marvellous about it? *(Looks at his watch.)* I must go and do some writing now. Excuse me, I haven't much time. *(Laughs.)* You've touched a very sore spot, as they say, and now I'm getting anxious and slightly irritable. But alright, let's have a talk. Let's talk about my marvellous, splendid life. Where shall we begin? *(Thinks for a while.)* You know what an *idée fixe* is, when a person thinks about nothing but the moon, say, all the time. Well, I have my own moon. Day and night I am obsessed by a single compulsive thought: I must write, I must write, I must... No sooner have I finished one novel, than I have to write another one, then a third, and after that a fourth. I write all the time, without a break. I can't help it. What's so marvellous and splendid about that? It's a ghastly life. Here I am enjoying being with you, yet all the time my thoughts are on the unfinished novel which awaits me. I look at that cloud shaped like a grand piano. And make a mental note to mention a cloud like that somewhere in a story. There's a scent of heliotrope. I make another note: sickly perfume, dreary colour, include in description of summer evening. I grab at each phrase, each word that you or I are uttering and hurry to lock them up in my writer's larder, just in case they may come in handy. When I finish work, I dash off to the theatre or go fishing in the hope of relaxing and forgetting about everything. But no! Some heavy iron weight is already beginning to stir in my brain—a new subject—so I'm driven back to my desk and forced to start writing again. It's like that all the time. I give myself no peace, and I feel that I am devouring my own life, that to obtain the honey which I give to some remote person, I am gathering pollen from my finest flowers, then plucking the flowers themselves and trampling on their roots. I must be mad, mustn't I? How can my friends and dear ones treat me like a normal person? "What are you writing now?" "What are you going to surprise us with next?" The same old thing, all the time. And I have

the feeling that all this attention from others, all this praise and adulation, is nothing but deception. I'm being deceived, like a sick person, and I'm sometimes afraid that someone will steal up on me from behind and carry me off to an asylum, like Poprishchin*. In my young, best years, when I was just beginning, writing was constant torment to me. A minor writer, particularly when he's not very lucky, feels clumsy, awkward and superfluous. His nerves are constantly on edge. He feels drawn to the company of people connected with literature and the arts and hangs around them, unrecognised and unnoticed, afraid to look them straight in the eye, like an inveterate gambler who has no money. I could not see my readers, but for some reason I imagined them to be hostile and suspicious. I was afraid of the public. It terrified me, and whenever a new play of mine was put on, I felt that the dark-haired members of the audience were hostile and the fair-haired ones indifferent. How dreadful it all was! What torment!

NINA. Yes, but surely inspiration and the actual process of writing must give you some moments of happiness?

TRIGORIN. Yes, I like writing. And I like reading the proofs, but the moment the thing is published I can't stand it. I see that it's all wrong, a mistake, that I should never have written it at all, and I feel angry and wretched. *(Laughs.)* Then the public reads it and says: "Yes, charming, talented, but nowhere near Tolstoy", or "Excellent, but not as good as Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*". And that's how it will be until my dying day—charming and talented—and nothing else. And when I die my friends will walk past my grave and say: "Here lies Trigorin. A good writer, but not as good as Turgenev".

NINA. I'm sorry but I refuse to accept that. You've simply been spoiled by success.

* The main character in Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*.

TRIGORIN. What success? I've never thought much of myself. Never liked myself as a writer. The worst of it is that I live in a sort of haze and often don't understand what I'm writing. I'm very fond of this lake, for example, the trees and the sky. I have a real feeling for nature. It awakens passion in me and the overwhelming desire to write. But I'm not just a landscape painter. I'm a citizen of my country as well. I love my native land and its people. I feel that as a writer I have a duty to write about my people, their suffering and their future, about science, the rights of man and so on. So I scribble on about everything, always in a rush, harried and criticised on all sides. And I veer from side to side like a fox with the hounds hot at his heels. And I see that life and science are forging ahead and I am lagging behind like a man who has missed his train, and eventually I realise that all I can do is paint landscapes and everything else I write is false to the very core.

NINA. You've been working too hard, and you haven't the time or the inclination to recognise your own importance. You may be dissatisfied with yourself, but for others you are great and wonderful. If I were a writer like you, I would dedicate all my life to the mob, but I would realise that they could be happy only by trying to reach my level, and they would draw me along in a chariot.

TRIGORIN. A chariot! Who do you think I am? Agamemnon?

They both smile

NINA. For the happiness of being a writer or an actress I would endure the displeasure of my family, poverty and disappointment, live in an attic, eat nothing but brown bread, and suffer agonies from the realisation of my own inadequacy, but in return I would demand fame—real, resounding fame. *(Covers her face with her hands).* Oh, I feel dizzy.

Arkadina's voice from the house: "Boris!"

TRIGORIN. They're calling me. To pack, I suppose. I really don't want to leave. *(Looks round at the lake.)* What a marvellous spot! How nice it is here!

NINA. Do you see that house and garden on the other bank?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

NINA. It belonged to my mother when she was alive. I was born there. I've lived here all my life, by this lake, and I know every tiny island on it.

TRIGORIN. It's a fine place! *(Notices the seagull.)* What's that?

NINA. A seagull. Kostya killed it.

TRIGORIN. A fine bird. I really don't want to leave here. Try to persuade Irina Arkadina to stay, eh? *(Makes a note in his book.)*

NINA. What are you writing?

TRIGORIN. Just a note or two. Had an idea for a story. *(Puts the book away.)* An idea for a short story: a young girl like you has been living all her life by a lake. She loves it like a seagull and is as free and happy as a seagull. Then a man happens to come along, sees her and destroys her just for the fun of it, like this seagull.

Pause

Arkadina appears in the window

ARKADINA. Boris, where are you?

TRIGORIN. Just coming. *(Walks away, then turns to look at Nina; to Arkadina up at the window.)* What is it?

ARKADINA. We're staying.

Trigorin goes into the house

NINA *(goes up to the footlights; after a moment's reflection).* I must be dreaming.

Curtain

ACT THREE

The dining-room in Sorin's house. Doors right and left. A sideboard. A medical cupboard. A table in the middle of the room. A trunk and hat boxes; signs of impending departure. Trigorin is having breakfast. Masha is standing by the table

MASHA. I'm telling you all this because you're a writer. You can use it if you like. I assure you frankly, if he had hurt himself badly I wouldn't have gone on living for another minute. All the same I've got courage. I've made up my mind once and for all to tear this love out of my heart, by the very roots.

TRIGORIN. And how will you do that?

MASHA. I'm getting married. To Medvedenko.

TRIGORIN. The schoolmaster?

MASHA. That's right.

TRIGORIN. I don't quite see the need for that.

MASHA. What's the point of loving without hope, waiting years on end for something. There won't be any time for love when I get married. New cares will drive out the old ones. And anyway it'll be a change, you know. Shall we have another?

TRIGORIN. Do you think we should?

MASHA. Oh, come on. *(Pours them both a glass.)* Don't look at me like that. Women drink far more than you think. But only a few drink openly, like me. The rest do it on the sly. Yes. And it's vodka or brandy. *(She clinks glasses with him.)* Here's to you. You're a nice person. I'm sorry to be saying good-bye to you. *(They drink.)*

TRIGORIN. And I'm sorry to be going.

MASHA. Well, why don't you ask her to stay?

TRIGORIN. No, she won't stay now. Her son is behaving most tactlessly. First he tries to shoot himself and now they say he wants to challenge me to a duel. Whatever for? He sulks and snarls and goes on about new forms. But

there's room for everything—the old and the new. Why all this pushing and shoving?

MASHA. I suppose it's jealousy, too. But that's none of my business.

Pause. Yakov crosses the stage from left to right with a suitcase. Nina enters and stands by the window

MASHA. My schoolmaster's not all that bright, but he's a good man and a poor one, and he loves me very much. I'm sorry for him. And for his old mother. Well, I wish you all the very best. Don't think badly of me. *(Shakes his hand warmly.)* Thank you for being so kind to me. Send me your books and be sure to autograph them. But don't write anything formal. Just "To Masha, who does not know where she belongs or what she is living for". Good-bye. *(Goes out.)*

NINA *(holding out a clenched fist to Trigorin).* Odd or even?

TRIGORIN. Even.

NINA *(sighing).* No. There's only one pea in my hand. I was trying to find out whether to go on the stage or not. I wish someone would advise me.

TRIGORIN. That's something you'll have to decide for yourself. *(Pause.)*

NINA. You're going away and—I don't suppose we shall see each other again. I'd like you to take this little medallion as a keepsake. I've had your initials engraved on it—and the title of your book *Days and Nights* on the other side.

TRIGORIN. How charming! *(Kisses the medallion.)* What a lovely present.

NINA. Think of me sometimes.

TRIGORIN. I will. I shall picture you as you were on that bright sunny day. Remember? A week ago when you were wearing that white dress ... and we talked ... and that white seagull was lying on the bench.

NINA *(pensively).* Yes, the seagull... *(Pause.)* We must stop talking, there's someone coming. Give me two minutes before you go, I beg you. *(Exit left; at the same time Arkadina enters with Sorin who is wearing a frock-coat with a medal on it, followed by Yakov who is busy with the packing.)*

ARKADINA. You'd do better to stay at home, old boy. You can't go round visiting with your rheumatism. *(To Trigorin.)* Who was that? Nina?

TRIGORIN. Yes.

ARKADINA. So sorry to have disturbed you. *(Sits down.)* Well, I think I've packed everything. I'm exhausted.

TRIGORIN *(reading the inscription on the medallion). Days and Nights,* page 121, lines 11 and 12.

YAKOV *(clearing the table).* Shall I pack your fishing rods too, sir?

TRIGORIN. Yes. I shall be needing them again. But you can give the books away.

YAKOV. Yes, sir.

TRIGORIN *(to himself).* Page 121, lines 11 and 12. What can be in those lines? *(To Arkadina.)* Are there any of my books in the house?

ARKADINA. In my brother's study. The bookcase in the corner.

TRIGORIN. Page 121... *(Exit.)*

ARKADINA. Really, Pyotr, you should stay at home.

SORIN. You're leaving. I shall be miserable here without you.

ARKADINA. And what will you do in town?

SORIN. Nothing in particular, but all the same. *(Laughs.)* There'll be laying the foundation stone for County Hall and that sort of thing. I just want to get away from this wretched life for a bit. I've been lying around here too long, like an old cigarette holder. I've ordered the horses for one, and we'll leave together.

ARKADINA *(after a pause).* Now you stay here and don't be miserable, and don't catch cold. Keep an eye on my son. Look after him. Teach him how to behave.

Pause

Here am I going away without knowing why Kostya tried to shoot himself. I think the main reason was jealousy, and the sooner I take Trigorin away from here the better.

SORIN. I'm not so sure. There were other reasons as well. It's understandable enough. A clever young man living in the country, miles from nowhere, with no money, no status in society and no prospects. Nothing to occupy him. Ashamed and afraid of his idleness. I'm extremely fond of him and he's very attached to me, but all the same he feels as if he doesn't belong here, as if he's cadging, living on charity. It's his pride ... understandable enough...

ARKADINA. Oh, what a worry he is to me! *(Thinks.)* Perhaps he should get a job in the civil service, or something...

SORIN *(whistles, then hesitantly).* I think the best thing would be if you ... gave him a little money. In the first place he needs some decent clothes and all that. Just look at him! He's been wearing the same old jacket for three years, and he hasn't got an overcoat. *(Laughs.)* He ought to get out and enjoy himself a bit. Travel abroad, or something. It doesn't cost that much.

ARKADINA. Well, I don't know. I might manage a new suit, but going abroad... No, I can't afford the suit either at the moment. *(Firmly.)* I haven't got the money.

Sorin laughs

I haven't!

SORIN *(whistles).* I see. Forgive me, my dear, and don't be angry. I believe you. You're a warm-hearted, generous woman.

ARKADINA *(bursting into tears).* I haven't got the money.

SORIN. If I had the money, I'd give it him myself, of course, but I haven't a bean. *(Laughs.)* The manager takes all my pension and spends it on farming, cattle-breeding and bee-keeping, so it disappears into thin air. The bees die, the cattle die, and I can never have the horses when I want them.

ARKADINA. Well, actually I do have some money. But I'm an actress. I have to spend the earth on clothes.

SORIN. You're sweet and kind. I know you are. Yes. Oh dear, I feel funny again. *(Sways.)* Come over all dizzy. *(Holds on to the table.)* I feel quite ill, eh, what?

ARKADINA *(frightened).* Pyotr! *(Tries to support him.)* Pyotr, my dear! *(Shouts.)* Help! Help!

Enter Kostya with a bandage round his head and Medvedenko

He's ill.

SORIN. It's nothing. *(Smiles and drinks some water.)* Better already, eh, what?

KOSTYA *(to his mother).* Don't be frightened, Mother, it's nothing serious. Uncle often gets these spells nowadays. *(To his uncle.)* You ought to lie down, Uncle.

SORIN. Yes, I will for a bit. But I'm still going to town. I'll have a lie-down, then off we go. Understandable enough. *(Walks off, leaning on his stick.)*

MEDVEDENKO *(takes his arm).* Do you know this riddle? What goes on four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, three in the evening...

SORIN *(laughs).* That's right. And on its back at night. Thank you, but I can manage on my own.

MEDVEDENKO. Now then. Don't stand on ceremony. *(He and Sorin go off.)*

ARKADINA. How he frightened me!

KOSTYA. It's bad for his health living in the country. He gets depressed. If you suddenly had a fit of generosity,

Mother, and lent him about two thousand roubles, he would be able to spend a whole year in town.

ARKADINA. I have no money. I'm an actress, not a banker.

Pause

KOSTYA. Change my bandage, Mother. You do it so well.

ARKADINA *(takes some iodine and a box of bandages out of the medicine cupboard).* The doctor's late.

KOSTYA. Yes. He promised to be here by ten, and it's twelve already.

ARKADINA. Sit down. *(Removes his bandage.)* You look as if you're wearing a turban. Yesterday someone dropped by in the kitchen and asked what nationality you were. It's almost healed, you know. There's nothing much left now. *(Kisses him on the head.)* I hope you won't do any more bang-bang when I've gone?

KOSTYA. No, Mother. It was in a moment of insane despair, when I couldn't control myself. It won't happen again. *(Kisses her hand.)* You've got magic hands. I remember a long time ago when you were still acting in the state theatres—I was just a little boy then—there was a fight in the yard, and one of the tenants, the washer-woman, got badly hurt. Remember? They carried her away unconscious. And you went to see her several times and took medicine to her, and washed her children in a tub. Surely you remember that!

ARKADINA. No, I don't *(Bandaging his head.)*

KOSTYA. Two ballerinas were living in the same block as us and they used to come over and have coffee with you.

ARKADINA. I remember that.

KOSTYA. They were very religious. *(Pause.)* These last few days I've loved you as gently and tenderly as I did when I was a child. I've no one at all except you now. But

why, why has that man got such a hold on you, Mother?

ARKADINA. You don't understand him, Konstantin. He's a man of very high principles...

KOSTYA. Yet when he learnt that I was proposing to challenge him to a duel his high principles did not stop him from behaving like a coward. He's leaving. Running away.

ARKADINA. What nonsense! It was I who asked him to leave.

KOSTYA. A man of high principles! Here are you and I almost quarrelling about him, while he's in the drawing-room or the garden laughing at us—and chatting up Nina, trying to persuade her that he's a genius.

ARKADINA. You delight in saying unpleasant things to me. I respect that man and would ask you not to say a bad word about him in my presence.

KOSTYA. And I don't respect him. You want me to regard him as a genius, too. Sorry, but I can't lie. His writing makes me sick.

ARKADINA. That's sheer jealousy. What else can they do—people who have no talent, but a very high opinion of themselves—except turn up their noses at real genius? But it's poor consolation.

KOSTYA *(ironically).* Real genius! *(Angrily.)* If it comes to that, I've got more talent than all of you put together. *(Pulls the bandage off his head.)* You're a lot of stick-in-the-mud old conservatives who monopolise art and think that only what you do is legitimate and real. Everything else you choke and stifle. I don't recognise you! I don't recognise you or him!

ARKADINA. You decadent!

KOSTYA. Go off to your nice little theatre and act in your miserable third-rate plays!

ARKADINA. I've never acted in third-rate plays. Leave me alone. You're not even capable of writing a wretched vaudeville. Kiev middle class! You sponger!

KOSTYA. You miser!

ARKADINA. You tramp!

Kostya sits down and begins to cry quietly

You nobody! *(Paces up and down excitedly, then stops.)* Don't cry. You mustn't cry. *(Begins to cry too.)* You mustn't... *(Kisses his forehead, cheeks and head.)* My dear, dear child. Forgive me! Forgive your sinful mother! Forgive an unhappy woman!

KOSTYA *(embraces her).* If you only knew. I've lost everything. She doesn't love me, I can't write anymore. I've got nothing to live for.

ARKADINA. Don't despair. Everything will be alright. He's going away, and she'll love you again. *(She wipes his tears.)* That's enough. We've made it up now, haven't we?

KOSTYA *(kisses her hands).* Yes, Mother.

ARKADINA *(tenderly).* Make it up with him, too. There's no need for a duel. Is there now?

KOSTYA. Alright. But please don't make me meet him, Mother. That would be too much. It's so hard...

Trigorin enters

There he is. I'm going. *(Quickly puts the dressings back in the cupboard.)* The doctor will do the bandage.

TRIGORIN *(looking through the book).* Page 121 ... lines 11 and 12... Here we are. *(Reads.)* "If you should ever need my life, come and take it."

Kostya picks up the bandage from the floor and goes out

ARKADINA *(glancing at her watch).* The horses will soon be here.

TRIGORIN *(to himself).* If you should ever need my life, come and take it.

ARKADINA. You've finished packing, I hope?

TRIGORIN *(impatiently).* Yes, yes. *(Musing.)* This innocent cry, why does it sound so sad to me? Why does it tug at my heartstrings? If you should ever need my life,

come and take it. *(To Arkadina.)* Let's have one more day here.

Arkadina shakes her head

One more day.

ARKADINA. I know what's keeping you here, darling, but do try to control yourself. You're a little intoxicated. Sober up.

TRIGORIN. You be sober too, please. Be sensible and reasonable, I beg of you. Look on all this as a true friend. *(Presses her hand.)* You're capable of making sacrifices. Be a friend. Let me go...

ARKADINA *(greatly agitated).* Are you that fascinated?

TRIGORIN. I feel drawn to her. Maybe it's exactly what I need.

ARKADINA. The love of a provincial girl? How little you know yourself!

TRIGORIN. People sometimes walk in their sleep. That's how I am now. I'm talking to you, but I feel as if I were asleep and dreaming of her. I'm full of sweet and wonderful dreams. Let me go...

ARKADINA *(trembling).* No, no. I'm just an ordinary woman like any other. You mustn't talk to me like that. Don't torment me, Boris. It's terrible.

TRIGORIN. You could be extraordinary, if you wanted to. A love that is young, entrancing and poetical, that carries you away into the world of dreams, this alone can give one happiness on earth. I've never known such a love yet. I was too busy in my youth, hanging around editorial offices and struggling against poverty. But now here it is. This love has come at last and is beckoning me. Why should I run away from it?

ARKADINA *(angrily).* You've taken leave of your senses.

TRIGORIN. What if I have?

ARKADINA. You've all conspired to torment me today! *(Cries.)*

TRIGORIN *(clasping his head).* She can't understand. She won't understand.

ARKADINA. Am I really so old and ugly that you feel free to talk to me about other women? *(Embraces and kisses him.)* You're mad! My wonderful, marvellous man! The last page in my life! *(Gets down on her knees.)* My joy, my pride, my happiness! *(Embraces his knees.)* If you leave me for as much as an hour, I'll never survive. I'll go mad, my wonderful one, my magnificent man, my master.

TRIGORIN. Someone might come in. *(Helps her up.)*

ARKADINA. Let them. I'm not ashamed of my love for you. *(Kisses his hands.)* My treasure! My reckless boy! So you want to go running wild, but I won't let you. I won't. *(Laughs.)* You're mine! Mine! This forehead, these eyes, this beautiful silky hair. You're all mine. You're so clever and gifted, the best writer of our day, Russia's only hope. You've so much sincerity, simplicity, freshness and full-blooded humour. You can paint a person or a landscape with a single stroke. Your characters are so alive. Reading your books is sheer delight. Do you think this is just hero-worship? Or flattery? Then look into my eyes. Come on. Do I look like a liar? You see? I'm the only one who appreciates you, the only one who tells you the truth, my sweet, wonderful Boris. You'll come with me, won't you? Yes? You won't leave me, will you?

TRIGORIN. I have no will of my own. Never have had. Weak, spineless, always submissive—can that really appeal to women? Take me, carry me away, but don't let me out of your sight for a single moment.

ARKADINA *(to herself).* Now he's mine. *(Casually, as if nothing had happened.)* But by all means stay if you like. I shall leave, but you can come on later, in a week's time. There's no particular hurry, after all.

TRIGORIN. No, we'll go together.

ARKADINA. As you like. Let's go together then...

Pause. Trigorin jots something down in his notebook

What's that?

TRIGORIN. I heard a good expression this morning: "Maiden's Grove". It's bound to come in handy. *(Stretches.)* So we're going, are we? More railway carriages, station platforms, buffets, meat balls, boring conversations...

SHAMRAYEV *(enters).* I have the honour of making the sad announcement that the horses are ready. It is time to leave for the station, dear lady. The train is due at five minutes past two. Be so kind as to do me that small favour, dear lady. Find out what has happened to the actor Suzdaltsev. Whether he's still alive and in good health. We used to drink together. He was magnificent in *The Mail Robbery.* The tragedian Ismailov, also a remarkable personality, used to act with him at that time in Elizavetgrad, I remember. No need to hurry, dear lady, you've got another five minutes. Once they were playing a pair of conspirators in a melodrama and when they were suddenly discovered, they had to say: "It's a trap", but Ismailov cried: "It's a prat." *(Guffaws.)* A prat!

While he is talking, Yakov fusses with the suitcases and the maid brings Arkadina her hat, coat, umbrella and gloves. Everyone helps Arkadina to put them on. The cook peeps round the left door and then comes in hesitantly a little later. Polina enters, followed by Sorin and Medvedenko

POLINA *(carrying a small basket).* Here are some plums for the journey. They're very sweet. You might feel like something tasty.

ARKADINA. You're so kind, Polina.

POLINA. Good-bye, my dear. Do forgive us if things weren't quite as they should have been. *(Cries.)*

ARKADINA *(embracing her).* Everything was splendid, absolutely splendid. But you mustn't cry.

POLINA. Our life is slipping away.

ARKADINA. There's nothing we can do about it.

SORIN *(wearing an overcoat with a shoulder cape and a hat, carrying his stick, comes out of the door left; walking across the room).* It's time to go, sister. We mustn't be late, eh? I'm going to the carriage. *(Exit.)*

MEDVEDENKO. I'll get to the station on foot. To see you off. I'll be quick. *(Exit.)*

ARKADINA. Good-bye, my dears. All being well, we'll meet again next summer.

The maid, Yakov and the cook kiss her hand

Don't forget me. *(Hands the cook a rouble.)* Here's a rouble for the three of you.

COOK. Thanking you kindly, Ma'am. And a safe journey to you. You've been very good to us.

YAKOV. God bless you, Ma'am!

SHAMRAYEV. Do honour us with a letter. It would make us so happy. Good-bye, Mr. Trigorin.

ARKADINA. Where's Kostya? Tell him I'm about to leave. We must say good-bye. Think kindly of me. *(To Yakov.)* I've given a rouble to cook. It's between the three of you.

All go off right. The stage is empty. Noises of people being seen off. The maid comes back to fetch the basket of plums on the table and goes off again

TRIGORIN *(returning).* I've forgotten my cane. I think it's on the terrace. *(Walks to the door left and meets Nina, who comes in.)* It's you! We're just leaving...

NINA. I felt sure we would see each other again. *(Excitedly.)* Mr Trigorin, I've made up my mind once and for all. The die is cast. I'm going on the stage. By tomorrow I'll be gone. I'm leaving my father, leaving everything, and starting a new life. I'm going to Moscow ... like you. We shall see each other there.

TRIGORIN *(glancing over his shoulder).* Stay at the Slavyansky Bazaar. Let me know the moment you arrive. At Groholsky's house in Molchanovka Street. I must rush....

Pause

NINA. One minute...

TRIGORIN *(in a low voice).* You're so beautiful. What happiness to think that we shall soon meet again.

She rests her head on his chest

I shall see those exquisite eyes again, that inexpressibly beautiful, tender smile... Those sweet features, that look of angelic purity... My dearest... *(A long kiss.)*

Curtain

Two years elapse between the third and fourth acts

ACT FOUR

The drawing-room in Sorin's house, which has been converted into a study for Kostya. Doors right and left leading into other rooms. A French window in the centre opens onto the terrace. Apart from the usual drawing-room furniture there is a writing desk in the right-hand corner, an ottoman by the door on the left, a bookcase, and books on the window-sills and chairs. It is evening. The room is dimly lit by a table lamp. The wind can be heard in the trees and the chimney. A watchman is tapping. Enter Medvedenko and Masha

MASHA *(calling).* Kostya! Kostya! *(Looking all round.)* There's no one here. The old man keeps asking "Where's Kostya? Where's Kostya?" He can't live without him...

MEDVEDENKO. He's afraid of being alone. *(Listening.)* What terrible weather! It's been like this for nearly two days now.

MASHA *(turning up the lamp).* There are waves on the lake, enormous ones.

MEDVEDENKO. It's dark in the garden. They ought to have that old stage pulled down. It's as bare and ugly as a skeleton, and the curtain flaps in the wind. When I walked past it yesterday evening I thought I heard someone crying there.

MASHA. What next...

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Let's go home, Masha.

MASHA (shaking her head). I'm spending the night here.

MEDVEDENKO *(beseechingly).* Do let's go, Masha. The baby must be hungry.

MASHA. Rubbish. Matryona will feed it.

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Poor little thing. This will be its third night running without its mother.

MASHA. How boring you've become. At least you used to talk about life before, but now it's nothing but the baby and going home all the time.

MEDVEDENKO. Let's go, Masha.

MASHA. Go yourself.

MEDVEDENKO. Your father won't give me a horse.

MASHA. Yes, he will. If you ask him.

MEDVEDENKO. I suppose I could ask him. So you'll be home tomorrow then?

MASHA *(takes a pinch of snuff).* Haven't I said so? Stop pestering me.

Enter Kostya and Polina. Kostya is carrying pillows and a blanket, and Polina some bed linen, which they put on the ottoman, Kostya then goes to his desk and sits down

What's that for, Mother?

POLINA. Mr Sorin wants his bed made up in Kostya's study.

MASHA. Let me do it. *(Makes up the bed.)*

POLINA *(sighing).* Old people are just like children. *(Goes up to the desk, leans on her elbow and looks at a manuscript. Pause.)*

MEDVEDENKO. Well, I'll be going then. Good-bye, Masha. *(Kisses his wife's hand.)* Good-bye, Mother. *(About to kiss his mother-in-law's hand.)*

POLINA *(irritatedly).* Well, alright. Off you go then.

MEDVEDENKO. Good-bye, Kostya.

Kostya gives him his hand in silence; Medvedenko goes off

POLINA *(looking at the manuscript).* Nobody ever thought that you would become a real writer, Kostya. And now, thank goodness, the magazines are even beginning to send you money. *(Strokes his hair.)* And you've got so handsome. Dear, good Kostya, try to be a bit nicer to my Masha.

MASHA *(making the bed up).* Leave him alone, Mother.

POLINA *(to Kostya).* She's a fine girl. *(Pause.)* All a woman wants is a little affection. I know that well enough.

Kostya gets up from his desk and leaves without a word

MASHA. Now you've made him angry. Why must you pester him, Mother?

POLINA. I'm sorry for you, Masha.

MASHA. A lot of good that does.

POLINA. It makes my heart ache. I see everything and understand what's going on.

MASHA. It's all nonsense. Unrequited love is only for novels. It's rubbish. The main thing is not to give way to it, not to indulge in vain hopes. If love creeps into your heart, you must get rid of it. They've promised to transfer my

husband to another district. As soon as we move, I shall forget everything—I'll tear it out of my heart by the roots.

The sound of a melancholy waltz being played two rooms away

POLINA. That's Kostya playing. That means he's feeling depressed.

MASHA *(dancing a few waltz steps silently).* The main thing is not to see him all the time. If they give my Semyon a transfer, I'll forget it all in a month, honestly. It's so silly.

The door left opens. Dorn and Medvedenko wheel in Sorin in his bath-chair

MEDVEDENKO. There are six of us at home now. And flour is two kopecks a pound.

DORN. Just try and make ends meet.

MEDVEDENKO. It's all very well for you to joke. You're rolling in money.

DORN. Me? In my thirty years of practice, my friend, and they were very trying years when I couldn't call a minute my own, day or night, I managed to save only two thousand, and I've just spent that on a trip abroad. So now I haven't a kopeck.

MASHA *(to her husband).* Haven't you gone yet?

MEDVEDENKO *(guiltily).* How can I, if they won't give me a horse?

MASHA *(quietly, with bitter annoyance).* I wish I'd never set eyes on you.

The chair stops in the left half of the room. Polina, Masha and Dorn sit down beside it. Medvedenko keeps his distance from them, miserably

DORN. What a lot of changes here. You've turned the drawing-room into a study.

MASHA. It's more convenient for Kostya to work

here. He can go out and think in the garden, when he feels like it.

Sound of the watchman tapping

SORIN. Where's my sister?

DORN. She's gone to the station to meet Trigorin. She'll be back in a minute.

SORIN. If you sent for my sister, I must be quite ill. *(After a pause.)* Funny, isn't it? Here am I dangerously ill, but no one gives me any medicine.

DORN. Well, what would you like? Valerian drops? Bicarbonate of soda? Quinine?

SORIN. There he goes again. These doctors are sent to try us. *(Nods towards the ottoman.)* Has that been made up for me?

POLINA. Yes, Mr Sorin.

SORIN. Thank you.

DORN *(sings).* "The moon glides o'er the sky at hight..."

SORIN. I want to give Kostya a subject for a novel. It should be called *The Man Who Wanted—L'homme qui a voulu.* As a young man I wanted to become a writer—and never did. I wanted to speak well—but spoke appallingly *(mimicks himself)* "and all that, sort of, er, hem". When I was trying to sum up a discussion I used to go bumbling on until I broke into a cold sweat. I wanted to get married—and never did. I wanted to live in the town—and here I am living out my days in the country, eh, what?

DORN. You wanted to become a Regular State Councillor—and you did.

SORIN *(laughing).* That was something I didn't want. It just happened.

DORN. Grumbling about one's life at the age of sixty-two is not a very dignified thing to do, you must agree.

SORIN. You are a stubborn one. I want to live, don't you understand?

DORN. That's just foolish. It's a law of nature that every life must have its end.

SORIN. You're talking as a man who's had his fill of life. You're satisfied, so you can afford to be indifferent. But when it comes to dying, you'll be afraid too.

DORN. Fear of death is an animal fear. It must be suppressed. The only people who consciously fear death are those who believe in everlasting life and are afraid because they have sinned. In the first place, you're not a believer, and in the second, what sins could you possibly have committed? You served in the Ministry of Justice for twenty-five years—and that's all.

SORIN *(laughing).* Twenty-eight...

Kostya comes in and sits on a low stool at Sorin's feet. All the while Masha does not take her eyes off him

DORN. We're stopping Kostya from working.

KOSTYA. Oh no, it doesn't matter.

Pause

MEDVEDENKO. Begging your pardon, Doctor, but which town abroad did you like best?

DORN. Genoa.

KOSTYA. Why Genoa?

DORN. The street crowds there are marvellous. When you go out of your hotel in the evening the whole street is thronged with people. You drift along aimlessly with the crowd, backwards and forwards, to and fro. You live with it, you become part of it psychologically, and you begin to believe that there actually might be a World Soul, like the one Nina Zarechnaya once acted in your play. By the way, where is she now? And how is she getting on?

KOSTYA. Alright, I suppose.

DORN. I was told that she has been leading a rather strange life. What's it all about?

KOSTYA. It's a long story, Doctor.

DORN. Well, make it short.

Pause

KOSTYA. She left home and had an affair with Trigorin. I expect you knew that.

DORN. Yes.

KOSTYA. She had a child and it died. Trigorin lost interest in her and returned to his previous attachments, as one might have expected. As a matter of fact, he had never given them up. Being so spineless, he managed to keep them all going at the same time. As far as I can judge, Nina's private life has been a complete disaster.

DORN. And what about the stage?

KOSTYA. That was worse still. She started in a summer theatre outside Moscow, then went to the provinces. At that time I never let her out of my sight. Wherever she went, I followed. She always took on big parts, but she acted crudely and tastelessly, with a forced voice and awkward gestures. There were moments when she showed talent—in uttering a cry or dying on the stage—but they were only isolated moments.

DORN. So she has some talent, after all?

KOSTYA. It's hard to tell. I think so. I saw her, but she refused to see me, and they would not let me into her room at the hotel. I understood how she felt and didn't insist on a meeting.

Pause

What else is there to tell you? Later when I returned home she began writing to me. Her letters were intelligent, warm and interesting. She didn't complain, but I realised that she was deeply unhappy. Every line was like a tense, throbbing nerve. And her mind seemed to be somewhat disturbed. She signed herself "Seagull". You know how the miller in *The Water Nymph* keeps saying he's a raven. Well, she kept repeating in her letters that she was a seagull. She's here now.

DORN. Here now? What do you mean?

KOSTYA. At a hotel in the town. She's been there for five days now. I was going to visit her, and Masha here went to see her, but she won't receive anyone. Medvedenko says he saw her in the fields about a mile away yesterday afternoon.

MEDVEDENKO. Yes, I did. She was walking in the opposite direction, towards the town. I greeted her and asked why she hadn't come to see us. She said she would.

KOSTYA. She won't.

Pause

Her father and stepmother won't have anything to do with her. They have put out watchmen to make sure she doesn't get anywhere near the house. *(Walks with the doctor over to the writing desk.)* How easy it is to be a philosopher on paper, Doctor, and how difficult in real life!

SORIN. She was a most charming girl.

DORN. What was that?

SORIN. I said, she was a most charming girl. Regular State Councillor Sorin was even a little enamoured of her for a time.

DORN. The old philanderer.

Shamrayev is heard laughing off-stage

POLINA. I think they've arrived from the station.

KOSTYA. Yes, I can hear Mother.

Enter Arkadina and Trigorin, followed by Shamrayev

SHAMRAYEV *(coming in).* We're all getting older and more decrepit, but you, dear lady, are as young as ever... A gay, frilly blouse, vivacious ... graceful...

ARKADINA. You want to bring me bad luck, you awful man.

TRIGORIN *(to Sorin).* Hello, sir. What's this about you being in bad health? That won't do, you know. *(Seeing Masha, jovially.)* Masha!

MASHA. So you recognised me? *(Shakes hands with him.)*

TRIGORIN. Are you married?

MASHA. Yes. Have been for some time now.

TRIGORIN. Happy? *(Bows to Dorn and Medvedenko, who bow in return, then goes up to Kostya hesitantly.)* Your mother tells me that you have forgotten the past and stopped being angry with me.

Kostya holds out his hand

ARKADINA *(to her son).* Look, Boris has brought the magazine with your new story.

KOSTYA *(taking it, to Trigorin).* Thank you. You're most kind.

All sit down

TRIGORIN. Your admirers want to be remembered to you. They're very interested in you in Petersburg and Moscow. I'm always being asked about you. What you're like, how old you are, whether you're dark or fair. For some reason they all seem to think that you're not a young man. And no one knows your real name, because you use a pseudonym all the time. You're as mysterious as the Man in the Iron Mask.

KOSTYA. Will you be staying here long?

TRIGORIN. No, I'm thinking of leaving for Moscow tomorrow. Can't help it. Got a novel to finish and I've promised to write something for an anthology of short stories. The old, old story as you can see.

While they are talking Arkadina and Polina move a card table to the middle of the room and open it. Shamrayev lights the candles and puts the chairs round. A game of lotto is brought out of the cupboard

The weather's not been very kind to me. There's a bitter wind. If it's dropped by the morning I'll go and do a spot

of fishing in the lake. Incidentally I must take a look round the garden and that spot where your play was acted—remember? I've got a subject for a new story, but I must check up on the scene of the action first.

MASHA *(to her father).* Let Semyon have a horse, father. He must get home.

SHAMRAYEV *(imitating her).* A horse ... must get home... *(Sternly.)* They've just come back from the station. You saw them yourself. How can I send them out again so quickly?

MASHA. But you have other horses. *(When her father does not reply, she waves her hand in irritation.)* Oh, what's the use!

MEDVEDENKO. I'll walk, Masha, Really.

POLINA *(sighing).* Walk, in this weather! *(Sits down at the card table.)* Come along, ladies and gentlemen.

MEDVEDENKO. It's only four miles, after all. Good-bye. *(Kisses his wife's hand.)* Good-bye, Mother.

His mother-in-law holds out her hand reluctantly for him to kiss

I wouldn't have bothered anyone, but it's the baby. *(Bows to the assembled company.)* Good-bye. *(Goes out with a guilty air.)*

SHAMRAYEV. He'll get there alright. He's not a general, after all.

POLINA *(knocking on the table).* Come along, ladies and gentlemen. Let's not waste time. They'll be calling us for dinner soon.

Shamrayev, Masha and Dorn sit down at the table

ARKADINA *(to Trigorin).* They always play lotto here in long autumn evenings. It's a very old set, see? My mother used to play with us when we were children. Do have a game with us before dinner. *(Sits down at the table with Trigorin.)* It's a dull game, but not too bad once you're used to it. *(Deals everyone three cards.)*

KOSTYA *(looking through the magazine).* He's read his story, but he hasn't even cut the pages of mine. *(Puts the magazine down on the desk and then walks to the door left; as he passes his mother, he kisses her on the head.)*

ARKADINA. Won't you play, Kostya?

KOSTYA. Sorry, I just don't feel like it. I'll take a stroll. *(Goes off.)*

ARKADINA. The stake is ten kopecks. Put it down for me, will you, Doctor?

DORN. Of course, Madam.

MASHA. Has everyone put down their stakes? I'm beginning. Twenty-two.

ARKADINA. Got it.

MASHA. Three!

DORN. There we are.

MASHA. Have you put three down? Eight! Eighty-one! Ten!

SHAMRAYEV. Don't go so quickly.

ARKADINA. What a reception I got in Kharkov. Goodness me. My head's still swimming from it.

MASHA. Thirty-four!

A sad waltz is heard off-stage

ARKADINA. The students gave me a standing ovation. Three baskets of flowers, two wreaths and this... *(Takes off a brooch and throws it on the table.)*

SHAMRAYEV. Very nice, I'm sure.

MASHA. Fifty!

DORN. Fifty, was that?

ARKADINA. I was wearing the most divine outfit. Say what you like, but I do know a thing or two about how to dress.

POLINA. That's Kostya playing. The poor boy's so unhappy.

SHAMRAYEV. He's been slated a lot in the newspapers.

MASHA. Seventy-seven!

ARKADINA. He shouldn't take any notice of that.

TRIGORIN. He's unlucky. He just can't manage to find his right style. His writing's strange, vague, sometimes even frenzied. None of his characters are alive.

MASHA. Eleven!

ARKADINA *(glancing round at Sorin).* Are you bored, Pyotr dear? *(Pause.)* He's asleep.

DORN. Regular State Councillor Sorin is asleep.

MASHA. Seven! Ninety!

TRIGORIN. If I lived in a country-house like this, by a lake, do you think I'd write? Not likely. I'd conquer the urge and do nothing but fish all day.

MASHA. Twenty-eight!

TRIGORIN. Catching a perch or a ruff—that's my idea of heaven.

DORN. Well, I believe in Kostya. He's got something, he has. He thinks in images. His stories are vivid and intense. They move me very strongly. But it's a pity he hasn't any definite aim. He produces an impression and that's all. But an impression is not enough. Are you glad that your son is a writer, Irina?

ARKADINA. Do you know, I haven't actually read anything of his yet. There's never any time.

MASHA. Twenty-six.

Kostya enters quietly and walks over to his desk

SHAMRAYEV *(to Trigorin).* By the way, Mr Trigorin, we've still got something of yours.

TRIGORIN. Oh? What's that?

SHAMRAYEV. Kostya once shot a seagull and you asked me to have it stuffed.

TRIGORIN. Did I? *(Thinks.)* I don't remember.

MASHA. Sixty-six! One!

KOSTYA *(flings open the window and listens).* How dark it is! I can't understand why I am feeling so restless.

ARKADINA. Close the window, Kostya. There's a draught.

Kostya closes the window

MASHA. Eighty-eight!

TRIGORIN. My game, ladies and gentlemen!

ARKADINA *(gaily).* Bravo! Bravo!

SHAMRAYEV. Bravo!

ARKADINA. What extraordinary luck the man has. *(Gets up.)* Let's go and have something to eat now. Our great man didn't have any lunch today. We'll play again after dinner. *(To her son.)* Leave your writing and come to dinner, Kostya.

KOSTYA. I don't feel like it, Mother. I'm not hungry.

ARKADINA. As you like. *(Wakes Sorin.)* Dinner, Pyotr, dear. *(Takes Shamrayev's arm.)* I'll tell you about the reception I got in Kharkov.

Polina puts out the candles on the table, then she and Dorn wheel away the bath-chair. Everyone goes out through the door left. Kostya remains alone on the stage, sitting at his desk

KOSTYA *(preparing to write, reads over what he has just written).* I've talked so much about new forms, but now I feel myself gradually slipping into the old rut. *(Reads):* "The notice on the wall announced... A pale face, framed with dark hair"... Announced, framed... It's just not good enough. *(Crosses it out.)* I'll begin with the hero being woken by the storm, and the rest will have to go. The description of the moonlit evening is too long and stilted. Trigorin has developed his own tricks. It comes easily to him. The neck of a broken bottle gleaming on the mill dam, the black shadow of the water wheel—and there's your moonlit night. But I have to go on about quivering light, and the gently twinkling stars, and the distant notes of a piano dying away in the quiet, fragrant air. It's excruciating! *(Pause.)* I'm becoming more and more convinced that

what matters is not new or old forms, but that a person should write without thinking about forms at all, write straight from the heart. *(There is a knock at the window by the desk.)* What was that? *(Looks out of the window.)* Can't see a thing... *(Unlocks the French window and looks into the garden.)* Someone just ran down the steps. *(Calls out.)* Who's there? *(Goes out. He can be heard pacing quickly up and down the terrace. Comes back in a minute with Nina Zarechnaya.)* Nina! Nina!

Nina puts her head on his chest and begins to weep softly

KOSTYA *(moved).* Nina! Nina! It's you! I had a feeling you'd come. I've been so terribly restless all day. *(Takes off her hat and cape.)* My angel, my sweet darling. She's come. Don't let's cry.

NINA. There's someone else here.

KOSTYA. No, there isn't.

NINA. Lock the doors, or someone may come in.

KOSTYA. No, they won't.

NINA. I know Irina Arkadina is here. Lock the doors...

KOSTYA *(locks the door on the right and goes up to the one on the left).* This one doesn't lock. I'll put a chair in front of it. *(Puts an armchair against the door.)* Don't be afraid. No one will come in.

NINA *(staring intently at his face).* Let me look at you. *(Gazing round the room.)* How nice and warm it is. This used to be the drawing-room. Have I changed a lot?

KOSTYA. Yes. You're thinner. And your eyes are larger. Nina, it's so strange to be looking at you. Why did you refuse to see me then? Why didn't you come before? I know you've been living here for almost a week now. I went to your hotel several times each day and stood under your window like a beggar.

NINA. I was afraid you might hate me. Each night I dream that you look at me and don't recognise me. If you only knew. Ever since I arrived I've been walking around

here, by the lake. I passed the house several times, but didn't dare come in. Let's sit down.

They sit down

Let's sit down and have a long, long talk. It's so nice here, so warm and cosy. Can you hear the wind? There's a passage in Turgenev that says: "Happy is he who has a roof over his head on a night like this, a warm corner of his own." I'm the seagull. No, that's wrong. *(Rubs her forehead.)* What was I saying? Oh, yes. Turgenev. "And may the good Lord help all homeless wanderers." Never mind. *(Sobs.)*

KOSTYA. Nina, you're crying again. Nina!

NINA. Don't worry. It makes me feel better. I haven't cried for two years. Late yesterday evening I came to see whether our stage was still there in the garden. It's still standing. I cried for the first time in two years and felt much easier in my mind, much better. See, I'm not crying anymore. *(Takes his hand.)* So you've become a writer. You're a writer and I'm an actress. We've both got caught up in it now. I used to be so happy, like a child. I'd wake up in the morning and burst into song. I loved you and I dreamed of fame, but now? I'm leaving for Yelets early in the morning—third-class with the peasants. And in Yelets merchants who like a bit of culture will pester me with their attentions. How sordid life is!

KOSTYA. Why are you going to Yelets?

NINA. I've got an engagement there for the winter. It's time I left.

KOSTYA. Oh, Nina. I cursed you, hated you, tore up your letters and photographs. But all the time I knew that I was yours for ever. I can't stop loving you, Nina. Ever since I lost you and my stories began to be published life has become intolerable. I suffer agonies. It's as though my youth has suddenly been wrenched away. I feel like an old man of ninety. I call your name, I kiss the ground you trod.

Wherever I look I see your face, the sweet smile that lit up the best years of my life.

NINA *(bewildered).* Why does he talk like this? Why does he talk like this?

KOSTYA. I'm quite alone, without the warmth of anyone's affection. I'm as cold as if I were in a dungeon, and whatever I write is dry, harsh and gloomy. Stay here, Nina, I implore you. Or let me come away with you.

Nina quickly puts on her hat and cape

Nina, why? For God's sake, Nina. *(Watches as she puts her things on; pause.)*

NINA. I've got a cab waiting at the gate. Don't see me out. I'll find my own way. *(Bursts into tears.)* Could I have some water, please?

KOSTYA *(gives her a glass of water).* Where are you going now?

NINA. To the town.

Pause

Is your mother here?

KOSTYA. Yes. Uncle was taken ill on Thursday and we sent her a telegram to come.

NINA. Why do you say that you kiss the ground I trod? I ought to be killed. *(Leans over the table.)* I'm so tired. If only I could rest ... rest. *(Raises her head.)* I'm a seagull. No, that's wrong. I'm an actress. Yes, that's right. *(Hearing Arkadina and Trigorin laughing, she listens for a minute, then runs to the door on the left and looks through the keyhole).* He's here, too. *(Returning to Kostya.)* Yes, that's right. Never mind. He didn't believe in the theatre. He was always laughing at my dreams and little by little I stopped believing in them as well and lost heart. And there were all the worries of being in love, jealousy, constant anxiety for the baby, I became petty and common. I acted badly. I didn't know what to do with my hands, how to

stand on the stage or how to control my voice. You can't imagine what it feels like to know you are acting badly. I'm a seagull. No, that's wrong. Do you remember killing a seagull? A man happens to come along, sees her and destroys her, just for the fun of it. An idea for a short story. No, that's wrong. *(Rubs her forehead.)* What was I talking about? The stage. I'm different now. I'm a real actress. I enjoy acting. I revel in it. The stage intoxicates me and I feel I am splendid. But while I've been living here I've been going for walks, walking and thinking, thinking and feeling myself grow stronger in spirit every day. Now I know, Kostya, I realise that what matters in our profession, whether we act on the stage or write, is not fame, not glory, not the things I used to dream about, but the capacity to endure. To bear your cross and have faith. I do have faith and it's not so painful now, and when I think about my calling I'm no longer afraid of life.

KOSTYA *(sadly).* You've found your path. You know where you are going. But I'm still threshing about in a chaos of dreams and images, not knowing who needs it or why. I have no faith and do not know what my calling is.

NINA *(listening intently).* Shush. I'm going now. Good-bye. When I become a great actress, come and watch me. Promise? But now... *(She presses his hand.)* It's late. I can hardly stand up. I'm so tired and hungry.

KOSTYA. Do stay. I'll get you some supper.

NINA. No, no. Don't see me out. I'll find the way myself. My cab is close by. So she brought him with her? Well, it doesn't matter. Don't say anything to Trigorin when you see him. I love him. Love him even more than before. An idea for a short story. I love him, passionately, desperately. It was so nice before, Kostya! Do you remember? Life was so pure, so warm, so gay and so innocent. Our feelings were like beautiful delicate flowers. Do you remember? *(Recites.)* "Men, lions, eagles and partridges, the antlered deer, geese, spiders, the silent fish

inhabiting the deep, the starfish and those creatures which the eye cannot see—in short, all living things, have completed their sad cycle and expired. For many thousands of years the earth has not borne a single living creature, and this poor moon now lights in vain its lantern. The cranes no longer awake with a cry in the meadows, and the cockchafers are not to be heard in the lime groves." *(Embraces Kostya impetuously and runs out through the French window.)*

KOSTYA *(after a pause).* Let's hope no one meets her in the garden and tells mother. It would upset her... *(For two minutes he tears up his manuscripts in silence, throws them under the table, then unlocks the door on the right and goes out.)*

DORN *(trying to open the door on the left).* That's strange. The door seems to be locked. *(Comes in and puts the armchair back in its place.)* Quite an obstacle race.

Enter Arkadina and Polina, followed by Yakov with some bottles, then Masha, Shamrayev and Trigorin

ARKADINA. Put the red wine and the beer for Mr Trigorin down here, on the table. We'll drink as we play. Let's sit down, everybody.

POLINA *(to Yakov).* You can bring the tea in now as well. *(Lights the candles and sits down at the card table.)*

SHAMRAYEV *(takes Trigorin to the cupboard).* Here's the thing I was telling you about. *(Takes the stuffed seagull out of the cupboard.)* Your order.

TRIGORIN *(looking at the seagull).* I don't remember. *(Thinks for a minute.)* No, I don't remember.

A shot is heard off-stage right. Everyone starts

ARKADINA *(frightened).* What was that?

DORN. Oh, nothing to worry about. I expect something in my medicine chest has gone off. *(Goes off through the door right and comes back thirty seconds later).* Yes, that's

what happened. A bottle of ether burst. *(Sings.)* "Again I stand before you, enchanted..."

ARKADINA *(sitting down at the table).* Ough, I was frightened. It reminded me of... *(Covers her face with her hands.)* Everything went black...

DORN *(leafing through a magazine, to Trigorin).* There was an article in here about two months ago. A letter from America. And I wanted to ask you ... *(takes Trigorin by the waist and leads him to the footlights)* ... since I'm very interested in this question ... *(drops his voice, in a hushed tone).* Take Madam Arkadina away somewhere. Kostya has shot himself...

Curtain

1896

UNCLE VANYA

Scenes from country life in four acts

CHARACTERS

ALEXANDER SEREBRYAKOV, a retired professor
HELEN, his wife, aged twenty-seven
SOFIA (Sonya), his daughter from his first marriage
MARIA VOYNITSKAYA, the widow of a privy councillor and mother of the Professor's first wife
IVAN (Vanya) VOYNITSKY, her son
MIKHAIL ASTROV, a doctor
ILYA TELEGIN, an impoverished landowner
MARINA, the old nanny
WORKMAN

The action takes place on Serebryakov's estate

ACT ONE

The garden. Part of the house with a terrace is visible. A table is laid for tea under an old poplar on an avenue. Benches and chairs. A guitar is lying on one of the benches. There is a swing near the table. It is between two and three on a cloudy afternoon

Marina (a dumpy, slow-moving old woman sitting by the samovar, knitting a stocking) and Astrov (pacing up and down nearby)

MARINA *(pours him a glass of tea).* Here's a nice glass of tea.

ASTROV *(takes the glass reluctantly).* I don't really want it.

MARINA. Maybe a drop of vodka then?

ASTROV. No, thanks, I don't drink vodka every day. And it's too hot anyway.

Pause

How long have we known each other, Nanny?

MARINA *(thinks hard).* How long? Goodness only knows. You came here, to these parts ... when was it? Vera Petrovna was still alive, Sonya's mother. You came to see us two winters while she was still here. So it must have been about eleven years ago. *(Thinks again.)* Or even more.

ASTROV. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. I should say so. You were young then, and handsome, but you've aged. Lost some of your good looks. And started drinking vodka too.

ASTROV. Yes... In ten years I've become a different person. And you know why? It's overwork, Nanny. I'm on my feet from crack of dawn with never a moment's rest. And I can't sleep at night for fear of being dragged out to a patient. I haven't had a single day off all the time I've known you. That's enough to age anyone, isn't it? And my life is so dull, and stupid and disgusting anyway. It would get anyone down. Nothing but crackpots all round you. Live with them for a year or two and you gradually become a crackpot yourself, without noticing it. You can't help it. *(Twirls his long moustache.)* Ugh, how long and stupid this moustache. I've grown into a crackpot, Nanny. Not completely, thank the Lord. I've still got a few brains in my head, but my feelings have gone numb. I want nothing, need nothing, and love no one... Except you perhaps. *(Kisses the top of her head.)* I had a nanny like you when I was a child.

MARINA. How about a bite to eat then?

ASTROV. No, thanks. In the third week of Lent I had to go to Malitskoye. They had an outbreak of typhus. The houses were crammed with sick people. Filth, stench, smoke, calves next to the patients. And pigs as well. I slaved away all day without a moment's rest or a bite to eat, then no sooner had I got home than they brought me a signalman from the railway. I put him on the table to operate, but he died on me under the chloroform. Then just when I didn't need them to, my feelings woke up, and my conscience began tormenting me as if I'd meant to kill him. I sat down, closed my eyes and started thinking. The people who live after us in a hundred or two hundred years time, say, the ones we're clearing the way for now, will they remember us with a kind word? They won't, Nanny, you know.

MARINA. If they don't, God will.

ASTROV. Thank you. That was well said.

Enter Voynitsky

VOYNITSKY *(comes out of the house. He has been dozing after breakfast and looks dishevelled. He sits down on a bench and adjusts his fancy tie).* Yes...

Pause

Yes...

ASTROV. Had a good nap?

VOYNITSKY. Yes, thanks ... very good. *(Yawns.)* Ever since the Professor and his wife arrived, life has been all topsy-turvy. I sleep at the wrong times, have most peculiar things to eat for breakfast and dinner, drink wine... It's all very unhealthy! I never had a free moment before. Sonya and I used to work away like Trojans. But now only Sonya works, and I just sleep, eat and drink. It's not right!

MARINA *(shaking her head).* Such goings-on! The Professor gets up at midday, when the samovar's been

ready and waiting for him all morning. Before they came we always had dinner just after twelve like other folk, but now it's dinner at six o'clock in the evening instead. The Professor reads and writes at night, then suddenly the bell rings at one in the morning. Goodness, what's the matter? He wants some tea. So you wake everyone up and heat the samovar. Such goin's-on!

ASTROV. Are they staying here long?

VOYNITSKY *(whistles).* Yes, for ages. The Professor's decided to settle here for good.

MARINA. Look at that. The samovar's been on the table for two hours, and they've gone out for a walk.

VOYNITSKY. Here they come. Don't worry.

The sound of voices. Serebryakov, Helen, Sonya and Telegin emerge from the garden, returning from their walk

SEREBRYAKOV. Splendid, splendid. The views are magnificent.

TELEGIN. Magnificent, Your Excellency.

SONYA. We'll go to the forestry plantation tomorrow, Father. Would you like to?

VOYNITSKY. How about some tea, everyone!

SEREBRYAKOV. I'll have tea in my study if you don't mind, friends! There's something I really must do today.

SONYA. I'm sure you'll like it at the forestry plantation.

Helen, Serebryakov and Sonya go into the house. Telegin walks up to the table and sits down beside Marina

VOYNITSKY. It's hot and sultry, yet our great scholar is parading in his coat and galoshes, with an umbrella and a pair of gloves.

ASTROV. He's obviously taking care of himself.

VOYNITSKY. How lovely she is! How lovely! I've never seen a more beautiful woman in all my life!

TELEGIN. Whatever I'm doing, Marina Timofeyevna, whether it's driving over the plains, walking in a shady garden or just looking at this table, I feel inexplicably, blissfully happy! The weather's superb, the birds are twittering, and here we all are, living in peace and harmony. What more could we want? *(Takes a glass.)* Thank you kindly!

VOYNITSKY *(dreamily).* Those eyes... Marvellous woman!

ASTROV. Tell us something, Voynitsky.

VOYNITSKY *(listlessly).* Tell you what?

ASTROV. Isn't there anything new?

VOYNITSKY. No, nothing. Everything's old. I'm just the same as I used to be, perhaps a bit worse, because I've got lazy. Do nothing but grumble and grouch like an old codger. My *maman*, the old jackdaw, is still babbling on about female emancipation, one eye on the grave while the other one searches in her clever books for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROV. What about the Professor?

VOYNITSKY. The Professor as usual sits writing in his study from early morning till late at night. "With furrowed brow our brains we rack as ode on ode we pen, but never hear a word of praise for us or even for them." I pity the paper! He should write his autobiography instead. What a wonderful subject, eh! A retired professor, a scholarly old fish as dry as dust. Suffers from gout, rheumatism, migraine and a liver swollen with envy and jealousy. This old fish lives on the estate of his first wife, because he can't afford to live in the town. He's always grousing about his misfortunes, although in fact he's extraordinary lucky. *(Nervily.)* Just think how lucky! The son of a mere sexton, with a seminary education, he managed to get some degrees and a professorship, became "His Excellency", a senator's son-in-law and so on and so forth. But that's not the main thing. Just imagine. A person reads and writes about art for

twenty-five years without understanding the first thing about it. For twenty-five years he has regurgitated other people's ideas on realism, naturalism and all the other isms. For twenty-five years he's been reading and writing about things that intelligent people knew long ago and stupid people don't care about anyway. In other words, for twenty-five years he's been wasting his time completely. Yet what conceit! What pretensions! He's gone into retirement, and not a soul has ever heard of him. He's completely unknown. That means for twenty-five years he's been holding a post that should have gone to someone else. But just look at him. He parades around as if he were the cat's whiskers.

ASTROV. It sounds as if you envy him.

VOYNITSKY. Yes, I do. The success he has with women! No Don Juan ever knew the like of it. His first wife, my sister, a lovely gentle creature as pure as the sky is blue, high-minded and warm-hearted, with more admirers than he had pupils, loved him as only the purest of angels can love those as pure and fine as themselves. My mother, his mother-in-law, still worships the ground he treads on. His second wife, a beautiful, intelligent woman—you saw her just now—married him when he was already an old man and gave him her youth, her beauty, her freedom and her radiance. Why? What on earth for?

ASTROV. Is she faithful to the Professor?

VOYNITSKY. Yes, unfortunately.

ASTROV. Why unfortunately?

VOYNITSKY. Because this fidelity is false from start to finish. It's full of rhetoric, but no logic. You mustn't be unfaithful to an old husband you can't stand, because that's immoral. But it's not immoral to stifle your own youth and vitality.

TELEGIN *(tearfully).* You shouldn't say that, Vanya. Honestly, you shouldn't. If you're unfaithful to your wife or husband, that means you're disloyal and you might

betray your country too!

VOYNITSKY *(irritably).* Oh, shut up, Waffles!

TELEGIN. Just listen, Vanya. The day after our wedding my wife ran off with her lover because of my unprepossessing appearance. Yet I have never failed to do my duty by her. I still love her and am faithful to her, help her in whatever way I can and have given all I possessed to educate the children she had by her lover. I lost my happiness, but kept my pride. But what about her? Her youth has gone, her beauty has faded as the laws of nature decree, and her lover has died. What does she have now?

Enter Sonya and Helen. A little later Maria Voynitskaya comes in with a book. She sits down and reads. She is given a glass of tea and drinks it without looking up

SONYA *(hurriedly to Nanny).* The peasants have come, Nanny. Go and talk to them. I'll look after the tea... *(Pours some tea.)*

The Nanny goes out. Helen picks up her cup and drinks, sitting on the swing

ASTROV *(to Helen).* I've come to see your husband. You wrote that he was very ill with rheumatism and something else, but he looks as fit as a fiddle to me.

HELEN. He was depressed yesterday and said his legs hurt, but he's alright today.

ASTROV. And I galloped like fury twenty miles to get here. Never mind, it's not the first time. At least I can stay here until tomorrow and get a decent night's sleep—*quantum satis.*"

SONYA. That's wonderful. You hardly ever spend the night here. I don't expect you've had dinner, have you?

ASTROV. No, I haven't.

SONYA. Then you'll be able to have it with us. We dine between six and seven now. *(Drinks.)* The tea's cold.

TELEGIN. The temperature in the samovar has dropped considerably.

HELEN. Never mind, Ivan Ivanovich, we can drink it cold if necessary.

TELEGIN. Begging your pardon, ma'm, but it is Ilya Ilyich, not Ivan Ivanovich. Ilya Ilyich Telegin, or, as some folk call me because of my pockmarked face, Waffles. I'm Sonya's godfather, and His Excellency, your husband, knows me very well. I live here now, on this estate, ma'm. If you don't mind my saying so, I have dinner with you each day.

SONYA. Ilya Ilyich is our assistant, our right-hand man. *(Affectionately.)* Let me pour you another glass, Godfather.

MARIA. Oh!

SONYA. What's the matter, Grandmother?

MARIA. I forgot to tell Alexander. My memory's going. I had a letter from Pavel Alexeyevich in Kharkov today. He sent me his new pamphlet.

ASTROV. Is it interesting?

MARIA. Yes, but it's rather strange too. He's disproving what he himself was defending seven years ago. That's dreadful!

VOYNITSKY. There's nothing dreadful about that. Drink up your tea, *maman.*

MARIA. But I want to talk!

VOYNITSKY. We've been talking and reading pamphlets for fifty years now. It's time we stopped.

MARIA. For some reason you can't bear to listen when I talk. I'm sorry, Jean, but you've changed so much over the last year that I simply don't recognise you. You were a man of firm convictions, an inspiring person...

VOYNITSKY. I'll say! An inspiring person who never inspired a living soul...

Pause

I was an inspiring person... You couldn't have made a more hurtful joke! I'm forty-seven now. Up till last year I tried deliberately, like you, to distract myself with all this scholastic nonsense so as not to see life as it is. And thought I was right in doing so. But now, if only you knew! I can't sleep at night for vexation, rage, that I let time slip by so stupidly, when I could have had everything which old age now denies me!

SONYA. Please don't, Uncle Vanya!

MARIA *(to her son).* You seem to be accusing your former convictions of something. But it's you who are to blame, not them. You forgot that convictions in themselves are nothing, just dead letters. It's what you do that counts.

VOYNITSKY. What you do? Not everyone can be a writing perpetuum mobile like your *Herr Professor.*

MARIA. And what precisely do you mean by that?

SONYA *(imploringly).* Grandma! Uncle Vanya! Please don't!

VOYNITSKY. I won't say another word. My apologies.

Pause

HELEN. It's nice weather today... Not too hot...

Pause

VOYNITSKY. Nice weather for hanging yourself.

Telegin starts tuning the guitar. Marina wanders around outside the house calling the chickens.

MARINA. Chuck, chuck, chucky...

SONYA. Why did the peasants come, Nanny?

MARINA. It's about that piece of waste-land again. Chuck, chuck, chucky...

SONYA. Who are you calling?

MARINA. The speckled hen's gone off somewhere with her chicks. Don't want the crows to get them. *(Exit.)*

Telegin plays a polka. They all listen in silence. A workman comes in

WORKMAN. Is the doctor here? *(To Astrov.)* Someone's come to fetch you, sir.

ASTROV. Who's that?

WORKMAN. From the factory.

ASTROV *(irritably).* Thank you kindly. Oh, well, I must be going. *(Looks around for his cap.)* What a nuisance, dammit.

SONYA. Yes, what a pity. Come back from the factory for dinner.

ASTROV. No, it'll be too late. It's no good... No good... *(To the workman.)* Be a good fellow and get me a glass of vodka, eh? *(Workman goes off.)* It's no good... No good... *(Finds his cap.)* In one of Ostrovsky's plays there's a man with a big moustache and little ability. That's me. Well, I'll take my leave, ladies and gentlemen. *(To Helen.)* If you came to see me, with Sofia Alexandrovna, I would be so pleased. My estate's not very big, only about seventy-five acres, but if you're interested it has the best orchard and nursery you'll find for miles around. And there's a state forestry plantation nearby. The forester's old and always in bad health, so actually I look after everything.

HELEN. I've been told you're very fond of forests. You can do a lot of good like that, of course, but doesn't it interfere with your real vocation? After all, you're a doctor.

ASTROV. God alone knows what our real vocation is.

HELEN. Is it interesting?

ASTROV. Yes, it's interesting work.

VOYNITSKY *(ironically).* Fascinating!

HELEN *(to Astrov).* You're still a young man, you don't look more than ... thirty-six, say, or thirty-seven. I doubt whether you find it as interesting as that. Nothing but forest all the time. It sounds boring to me.

SONYA. No, it's extremely interesting. Doctor Astrov plants new trees every year, and he's already been given a

bronze medal and a diploma. He does all he can to stop the old forests from being destroyed. If you listen to him, you'll agree with him completely. He says that forests adorn the earth, that they teach people to understand beauty and lift up their hearts. Forest can temper a harsh climate. And in countries with a mild climate, people use up less strength fighting nature, so they are gentler and more sensitive. The people there are beautiful, lithe, very responsive. Their speech is refined and their movements are graceful. The sciences and arts flourish there, their philosophy is not gloomy and their attitude to women is dignified and courteous.

VOYNITSKY *(laughing).* Bravo! Bravo! That sounds very nice, but not convincing, so *(to Astrov)* allow me to go on using wood to build barns and burn in the stove.

ASTROV. You could burn peat in your stove and build stone barns. Of course, I admit that trees have to be felled sometimes, but why just squander them? Russian forests are shuddering under the axe, millions of trees are being wasted, wild animals and birds are losing their homes, rivers are growing shallow and drying up, wonderful landscapes are disappearing without trace, and all because people are too lazy or stupid to bend down and get fuel from the ground. *(To Helen.)* Isn't that true, ma'am? Only a mindless savage .could burn this beauty in his stove, destroy something we cannot create. Man is blessed with a brain and creative powers to increase what has been given to him, but so far he has only destroyed, not created. The forests are shrinking, the rivers are drying up, the wild fowl is dying out, the climate is getting worse, and each day the land is growing poorer and uglier. *(To Voynitsky.)* I see from your ironical expression that you don't think what I'm saying is serious, and ... and perhaps it really is a bit cranky, but when I walk past forests I've saved from being cut down, or hear young saplings I have planted myself rustle in the breeze, I know the climate is to some small

extent in my power, and if people are happy a thousand years from now, it will be to some very small extent thanks to me. When I plant a birch tree and see it burst into leaf and sway in the wind, my heart swells with pride, and I... *(Notices the workman who has brought him a glass of vodka on a tray.)* Never mind ... *(drinks)* time for me to go. That's probably just my crankiness. Allow me to take my leave! *(Walks towards the house.)*

SONYA *(takes his arm and goes with him).* When will you come to see us again?

ASTROV. I don't know.

SONYA. Not for another month?

Astrov and Sonya go into the house. Maria and Telegin stay by the table. Helen and Voynitsky walk over to the terrace

HELEN. You behaved disgracefully again. Upsetting Maria Vasilievna with your talk about perpetuum mobile! And arguing with Alexander at breakfast again. It's all so petty!

VOYNITSKY. But what if I hate him!

HELEN. There's no reason to hate Alexander. He's just like anyone else. No worse than you.

VOYNITSKY. If you could only see your face, your movements. You're so tired of life! So tired!

HELEN. Yes, tired and bored! Everyone finds fault with my husband and pities me; poor thing, she's got an old husband! How well I understand it, that pity for me! It's true what Astrov said just now. You're all ruining the forests senselessly. Soon there won't be any left. And you ruin people in the same way. Soon thanks to you there won't be any fidelity, purity or ability for self-sacrifice left. Why can't you bear to look at a woman unless she's yours? I'll tell you why. The doctor was right, there's a demon of destruction in all of you. You feel no pity for the forests, the birds, women or one another.

VOYNITSKY. I don't like that sort of philosophy!

Pause

HELEN. The doctor has such a tired, worried face. An interesting face. He obviously appeals to Sonya. She's in love with him, and I understand why. He's come three times since I've been here, but I'm shy and I've never had a proper talk to him, never been nice to him. He thinks I'm wicked. You and I probably get on so well because we're both such tedious, boring people. Don't look at me like that. I don't like it.

VOYNITSKY. How else can I look at you, if I love you? You are my happiness, my life, my youth! I know there isn't a chance in a million that you'll feel anything in return, but I don't ask for anything, except to look at you and listen to your voice...

HELEN. Be quiet, someone might hear you!

They go into the house

VOYNITSKY *(walking behind her).* Let me just talk to you about my love. Don't send me away. That alone will give me the greatest happiness.

HELEN. This is intolerable...

They both go into the house

Telegin strikes up a polka on the guitar. Maria makes a note in the margins of the pamphlet.

Curtain

ACT TWO

The dining room in Serebryakov's house. Night-time. The watchman is tapping in the garden.

Serebryakov (dozing in an armchair by an open window) and Helen (sitting next to him and also dozing)

SEREBRYAKOV *(waking up with a start).* Who's that? Is it you, Sonya?

HELEN. It's me.

SEREBRYAKOV. You, my dear. I've got the most excruciating pain...

HELEN. Your rug's fallen on the floor. *(Wraps it round his legs.)* I'll close the window, Alexander.

SEREBRYAKOV. No, it's stifling. I dozed off just now and dreamt I couldn't feel my left leg. Then an agonising pain woke me up. It's not gout, more like rheumatism. What's the time?

HELEN. Twenty past twelve.

Pause

SEREBRYAKOV. Have a look for Batyushkov in the library this morning. I think we've got him.

HELEN. What?

SEREBRYAKOV. Have a look for Batyushkov in the morning. I remember we did have him. Why is it so hard for me to breathe?

HELEN. You're tired. You didn't have any sleep last night.

SEREBRYAKOV. They say Turgenev got angina pectoris from gout. I'm afraid I might get it too. Curse old age. How revolting it is, damn it. When I got old I began to loathe myself. And all of you must loathe the very sight of me.

HELEN. You talk about your age as if we were all to blame for it.

SEREBRYAKOV. You must loathe me most of all.

Helen walks away and sits down

Of course, you're right. I'm not stupid, I understand.

You're young, healthy and beautiful. You want to live. And I'm an old man, almost a corpse. Well, then? How can I not understand? Of course it's stupid that I'm still alive. But wait a bit, and I'll soon set you all free. I won't last much longer.

HELEN. I'm worn out. Do be quiet, for God's sake.

SEREBRYAKOV. It transpires that thanks to me everyone is worn out, bored stiff and wasting their youth. The only person who's content and enjoying life is me. Oh, yes, of course!

HELEN. Do stop! You're driving me crazy!

SEREBRYAKOV. I drive everyone crazy. Of course.

HELEN *(through tears).* It's unbearable! Tell me, what do you want of me?

SEREBRYAKOV. Nothing.

HELEN. Then do be quiet, please.

SEREBRYAKOV. It's a strange thing, but if Vanya or that old idiot Maria say anything everyone listens as a matter of course, yet as soon as I open my mouth they all begin to feel dreadfully miserable. Even my voice is loathsome. Granted that I am loathsome, selfish and despotic, surely I have some right to be selfish in my old age, don't I? Surely I've earned that right, haven't I? Surely I have the right to a peaceful old age and a little attention from other people, don't I?

HELEN. No one's questioning your rights.

The window bangs in the wind

It's got windy, I'll close the window. *(Closes it.)* It will rain soon. No one's questioning your rights.

A pause. The watchman in the gardens shakes his clapper and sings

SEREBRYAKOV. All my life has been devoted to learning. I'm used to my study, the lecture hall, distinguished colleagues. Then all of a sudden I find myself in this

crypt, seeing stupid people day in day out, listening to their tedious conversations. I want to live properly. I love success, fame, creating a stir, but here it's like being in exile. I spend all my time longing for the old days, reading about other people's success and fearing death. I can't bear it! It's getting me down! And on top of everything else people can't forgive me for being old!

HELEN. Wait a bit longer, be patient. I'll be old too in five or six years' time.

Enter Sonya

SONYA. You asked us to send for Doctor Astrov, Papa, but when he came you refused to see him. That's not very nice. To trouble a person for nothing...

SEREBRYAKOV. What do I care about your Astrov? He knows as much about medicine, as I do about astronomy.

SONYA. We can't get the whole medical faculty out here for your gout.

SEREBRYAKOV. I refuse to talk to that crackpot.

SONYA. As you like. *(Sits down.)* It makes no difference to me.

SEREBRYAKOV. What's the time?

HELEN. After midnight.

SEREBRYAKOV. It's stifling. Give me those drops on the table, Sonya.

SONYA. Here you are. *(Hands him the drops.)*

SEREBRYAKOV *(irritably).* Oh, not those! Can't ask anyone to do anything!

SONYA. Don't get cantakerous, please. It may appeal to some people, but leave me out, if you don't mind! I don't like it. And I haven't the time. I've got to get up early in the morning for the haymaking.

Enter Voynitsky in a dressing-gown with a candle

VOYNITSKY. There's going to be a storm.

Lightning

Look at that! Hélène and Sonya, go to bed. I've come to relieve you.

SEREBRYAKOV *(alarmed).* No, no! Don't leave me alone with him! No. His talking will be the death of me.

VOYNITSKY. But they must have some rest! They didn't get any sleep last night.

SEREBRYAKOV. Let them go to bed, but you go away too. Thank you very much. I beg you. For the sake of our former friendship, don't object. We'll talk later.

VOYNITSKY *(wrily).* Our former friendship... Former...

SONYA. Be quiet, Uncle Vanya.

SEREBRYAKOV *(to his wife).* Don't leave me alone with him, my dear! His talking will be the death of me.

VOYNITSKY. This is getting ridiculous.

Enter Marina with a candle

SONYA. You should go to bed, Nanny. It's late.

MARINA. The samovar hasn't been put away yet. How can I go to bed?

SEREBRYAKOV. Everyone's worn-out from lack of sleep. I'm the only one who's having a good time.

MARINA *(goes up to Serebryakov, affectionately).* What's the matter? Does it hurt? I've got this nagging pain in my leg too, won't let me be. *(Adjusts his rug.)* That's an old trouble of yours. Vera Petrovna, God rest her soul, Sonya's mother, used to get so worried she couldn't sleep at night. Very fond of you, she was...

Pause

Everybody likes a bit of sympathy, but us old folk don't get much of it. *(Kisses Serebryakov's shoulder.)* Come

along to bed now, sir. Come along, dearie. I'll give you some nice lime tea and warm your feet. And say a prayer for you to the good Lord.

SEREBRYAKOV *(moved).* I'm coming, Marina.

MARINA. I've got this nagging pain in my leg too, won't let me be! *(She and Sonya lead him out.)* Vera Petrovna used to get so worried and cry all the time. You were just a little mite then, Sonya. Come along, sir, come along...

Serebryakov, Sonya and Marina go off

HELEN. He's worn me out. I can hardly stand up.

VOYNITSKY. He's worn you out, and I've worn myself out. This is the third night running I can't sleep.

HELEN. There's something wrong with this house. Your mother hates everything except her pamphlets and the Professor. The Professor's irritable. He won't believe me, and he's afraid of you. Sonya's annoyed with her father and me and hasn't spoken to me for a fortnight. You hate my husband and openly despise your mother. I'm irritable and have burst into tears about twenty times today. There's something wrong with this house.

VOYNITSKY. Let's not philosophise.

HELEN. You're educated and intelligent enough to understand that the world is not destroyed by thieves or fires, but by hatred, enmity and all this petty squabbling. Instead of complaining all the time, you should try to reconcile everyone.

VOYNITSKY. First reconcile me with myself! My dearest... *(Kisses her hand.)*

HELEN. Don't do that! *(Takes her hand away.)* Go away.

VOYNITSKY. The rain will stop soon, and all nature will be refreshed and sigh with relief. Only I will not be refreshed by the storm. Day and night, like a house spirit, I am tormented by the thought that my life is irretrievably

lost. I have no past. It was squandered stupidly on pointless things. The present is so absurd that it frightens me. Here is my life and my love. Where shall I put them? What shall I do with them? My love is perishing in vain, like a ray of sunlight falling into a dark pit, and I myself am perishing too.

HELEN. When you talk to me about your love, I go numb and don't know what to say. I'm sorry, but there is nothing I can say to you. *(Makes to leave.)* Good night.

VOYNITSKY *(bars her way).* If only you knew how I suffer from the thought that beside me in this very house another life is being wasted—yours! What are you waiting for? What damned philosophy holds you back? Understand, please try to understand...

HELEN *(stares hard at him).* You're drunk, Ivan Petrovich!

VOYNITSKY. That's possible...

HELEN. Where's the doctor?

VOYNITSKY. He's in there ... spending the night with me. That's possible... Anything's possible!

HELEN. So you've been drinking again, have you? Why do you do it?

VOYNITSKY. It makes me think I'm living... Don't try to stop me, Hélène!

HELEN. You never used to drink or talk so much before... Go to bed. You're getting on my nerves.

VOYNITSKY *(kissing her hand).* My dear ... wonderful woman!

HELEN *(irritably).* Leave me alone. This is intolerable. *(Goes out.)*

VOYNITSKY *(alone).* She's gone...

Pause

I first met her ten years ago at my late sister's. She was seventeen, and I was thirty-seven. Why didn't I fall in love with her then and propose to her? It would have been the

easiest thing in the world! And now she would have been my wife... Yes... We would have woken up together from the storm. She would be frightened by the thunder, and I would hold her in my arms and whisper, "Don't worry, I'm here." What a marvellous thought. It makes me feel so good, I'm even laughing. Dear God, my thoughts are in such a muddle... Why am I so old? Why doesn't she understand me? Her high-flown talk, her lazy morality, her rubbishy, lazy ideas about the destruction of the world—I find all that quite detestable.

Pause

How I've been tricked! I worshipped that Professor, that gouty old wretch, and worked like an ox for him! Sonya and I squeezed everything we could out of this estate. We traded like tight-fisted peasants in vegetable oil, peas and cottage cheese, went hungry ourselves, and scraped together thousands of roubles to send to him. I was proud of him and his learning. I lived and breathed for him! Everything he wrote and uttered seemed brilliant to me... But now, oh, God! Now he's retired, and you can see what his life's really worth. Not a single page of his work will survive after him. He is completely unknown, a nonentity! A soap bubble! And I've been tricked... I can see it now, stupidly tricked.

Enter Astrov in a frock-coat without his waistcoat and tie. He is slightly tipsy. Telegin follows with a guitar

ASTROV. Play something!
TELEGIN. They're all asleep, sir.
ASTROV. Never mind. Play something.

Telegin strums quietly

(To Voynitsky.) You alone here? No ladies? *(Puts his arms akimbo and sings softly.)* "The house is rocking, so is the

bed. Where is the master to lay his head?" The storm woke me up. Nice drop of rain. What's the time?

VOYNITSKY. God only knows.

ASTROV. I thought I heard the Professor's wife.

VOYNITSKY. She was here just now.

ASTROV. Superb woman. *(Looks at the medicine bottles on the table.)* What a collection of prescriptions! From Kharkov, Moscow, Tula... He's pestered them all with his gout. Is he really ill or just pretending?

VOYNITSKY. He's really ill.

Pause

ASTROV. Why are you so down in the dumps today? Sorry for the Professor, eh?

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone.

ASTROV. Or in love with his wife perhaps?

VOYNITSKY. She's my friend.

ASTROV. Already?

VOYNITSKY. What do you mean "already"?

ASTROV. A woman can only be a man's friend in the following order. First she becomes his acquaintance, then his mistress, and only then his friend.

VOYNITSKY. That's pretty crude reasoning.

ASTROV. What? Yes... I must confess, I am getting rather crude. I'm drunk too, see. I usually only get drunk once a month. When I'm in this state, I become very insolent and cheeky. Feel I can cope with absolutely everything! I take on the most difficult operations and perform them brilliantly. I draw the most ambitious plans for the future. In this state I don't think I'm a crackpot, I believe I'm doing a tremendous service to mankind ... tremendous! In this state I have my own philosophical system in which all of you, my hearties, are midges ... microbes. *(To Telegin.)* Play something, Waffles!

TELEGIN. I'd be only too glad to, old chap, but do remember—they're all asleep!

ASTROV. Play something!

Telegin strums something softly

I want a drink. Come on. I think there's a drop of brandy left in there. When it gets light, we'll go over to my place. 'Ow abaht that? I've got an assistant who never says "how about that", but "'ow abaht that." He's a real scoundrel. Well, 'ow abaht that? *(Sees Sonya come in.)* I've no tie on, excuse me. *(Goes out quickly, followed by Telegin.)*

SONYA. You've been drinking with the doctor again, Uncle Vanya. Birds of a feather. He's always at it, but what made you? It's not right for someone of your age.

VOYNITSKY. Age has got nothing to do with it. When you don't have a real life, you make do with mirages. They're better than nothing.

SONYA. The hay's been cut, it's rotting away in the rain each day, and all you can do is talk about mirages. You don't help to run the estate at all now... I have to do everything and I'm worn out... *(Alarmed.)* There are tears in your eyes, Uncle!

VOYNITSKY. What tears? It's nothing ... nonsense. You looked at me then just like your mother used to. My dear... *(Kisses her hands and face avidly.)* My sister ... my sweet sister ... where is she now? If only she knew! Oh, if only she knew!

SONYA. What, Uncle? Knew what?

VOYNITSKY. No, it's wrong, I mustn't... Nothing... Later... Nothing... I'll be going... *(Goes out.)*

SONYA *(knocks on the door).* Doctor, Astrov! Are you awake? Could I have a word with you?

ASTROV *(through the door).* Just a moment! *(Comes out a little later now in his waistcoat and tie.)* What can I do for you?

SONYA. Drink yourself, if you don't find it disgusting, but please don't encourage Uncle to drink. It's bad for him.

ASTROV. Very well. We won't drink any more.

Pause

I'll go home now. That's signed and settled. It'll get light while they're harnessing the horses.

SONYA. It's raining. Wait until morning.

ASTROV. The storm's passing us by. We'll only catch the edge of it. I'll be going. And please don't call me out to your father any more. I tell him it's gout, and he says it's rheumatism. I ask him to lie down, and he sits up. And today he wouldn't even talk to me.

SONYA. He's spoilt. *(Looks in the sideboard.)* Would you like something to eat?

ASTROV. Yes, I wouldn't mind.

SONYA I like having little snacks at night. There should be something in the sideboard. They say he was very popular with the women in his time, and his ladies all spoilt him. Have some cheese.

They stand by the sideboard and eat

ASTROV. I've had nothing to eat today, only to drink. Your father's a difficult man. *(Gets a bottle out of the sideboard.)* May I? *(Drinks a glass.)* There's no one else here, so I can speak plainly. You know, I don't think I could live in this house of yours for a single month. I'd stifle to death in this atmosphere. Your father, who's totally immersed in his gout and his books, Uncle Vanya with all his grumbling, your grandmother, and your step-mother...

SONYA. What about my step-mother?

ASTROV. Everything in a person should be beautiful, face, clothes, heart and mind. She's beautiful, there's no doubt about that, but ... she does nothing except eat, sleep, go for walks and charm us all with her beauty. She has no responsibilities. Other people do everything for her. It's true, isn't it? An idle life can't be a decent one.

Pause

But perhaps I'm being too hard on her. I'm dissatisfied with life, like your Uncle Vanya, and the two of us are turning into real old grousers.

SONYA. Aren't you satisfied with life?

ASTROV. In general I love life, but I can't stand life in the Russian provinces, this dreary life of ours, I hate it with all my heart. As for my own private life, there's nothing good about that, I can tell you. You know what it's like walking through the forest on a dark night. If there's a light shining in the distance, you don't notice your fatigue, or the dark, or the prickly branches lashing your face... I work harder than anyone else in the district, as you know. Fate beats me mercilessly, sometimes I suffer quite intolerably, yet I have no light shining in the distance. I have no hopes for myself anymore, I don't love people. I haven't loved anyone for a long time.

SONYA. Not anyone?

ASTROV. No, not anyone. The only person I feel any affection for is your Nanny, for old time's sake. The peasants here are a dull, ignorant lot who live in squalor, and I can't get on with the intelligentsia. They wear me out. All of them, those dear friends of ours, have shallow minds and can't see any further than their noses. They're downright stupid. And the cleverer, more perceptive ones are hysterical, consumed by self-analysis and introspection. They whine and bicker and slander one another, sidle up to a person, squint at him and dismiss him with "Oh, he's a real nut-case!" or "Just an old wind-bag!" And when they don't know what label to stick on my forehead, they say "He's a strange fellow, he is!" I'm fond of forests—that's strange. I don't eat meat—that's strange too. You don't find anyone with a sincere, direct attitude to nature and other people these days... It just doesn't exist. *(Is about to drink.)*

SONYA *(restraining him).* No, please don't have any more.

ASTROV. Why not?

SONYA. It's not right for someone like you! You're a sensitive person. You have a gentle voice. I don't know anyone who is as wonderful as you. Why do you want to be like ordinary people who do nothing but drink and play cards? Please don't do that, I beg of you! You are always saying that people don't create, but only destroy what has been given to them from above. Then why, oh, why are you destroying yourself? You mustn't, you mustn't, please, I beseech you.

ASTROV *(stretches out a hand to her).* Alright, I won't drink any more.

SONYA. Promise me.

ASTROV. I promise.

SONYA *(squeezes his hand hard).* Thank you.

ASTROV. Basta! That's sobered me up. See, I'm quite sober now and that's how I'll stay to the end of my days. *(Looks at his watch.)* Just let me finish what I was saying. I'm past it now. It's too late for me. I've aged, worked myself into the ground, grown coarse and insensitive, and I don't think I could get attached to anyone now. I don't love anyone—and I never will. The only thing that still moves me is beauty. I can't help responding to it. Now if Helen wanted to, I think she could turn my head in no time at all. But that's not love or affection... *(Puts a hand over his eyes and shudders.)*

SONYA. What's the matter?

ASTROV. Nothing. One of my patients died under chloroform in Lent.

SONYA. It's time you forgot about that.

Pause

Tell me, Doctor. If I had a friend or a younger sister, and you discovered that she ... well, say, she was in love with you, what would you feel about it?

ASTROV *(shrugging).* I don't know. Nothing at all, I suppose. I'd let her know somehow that I couldn't love her... Anyway I've got other things on my mind. If I'm going, I'd better be on my way. I'll say goodbye, my dear, or we'll ramble on all day! *(Shakes her hand.)* I'll go through the drawing room, if you don't mind, or I'm afraid your uncle might stop me. *(Goes out).*

SONYA *(alone).* He didn't say a thing to me... His heart and soul are still hidden from me, but why do I feel so happy? *(Laughs with happiness.)* I told him "you're sensitive, high-minded, you've got a gentle voice..." It didn't sound wrong, did it? His voice vibrates and caresses... I can feel it in the air. But when I told him about the younger sister, he didn't understand... *(Wrings her hands.)* It's so awful to be plain! So awful! And I know that I'm plain, I know, I know... When we were coming out of church last Sunday, I heard them talking about me, and one woman said "She's very good and kind, it's a pity she's so plain..." So plain...

Enter Helen

HELEN *(opens a window).* The storm's over. What nice fresh air!

Pause

Where's the Doctor?

SONYA. He's left.

Pause

HELEN. Sophie!

SONYA. What?

HELEN. How long are you going to sulk like this? We haven't done each other any harm. Why should we be enemies? Do let's stop it...

SONYA. I wanted to myself... *(Embraces her.)* Let's not be angry any more.

HELEN. That's splendid.

They are both agitated

SONYA. Has Father gone to bed?

HELEN. No, he's sitting in the drawing room. We haven't said a word to each other for weeks, and goodness only knows why... *(Sees that the sideboard is open.)* What's that for?

SONYA. Doctor Astrov had a bit of supper.

HELEN. There's some wine too. Let's drink to our friendship.

SONYA. Yes, let's.

HELEN. We must both drink from the same glass. *(Pours one out.)* It's better like that. Well, then, are we friends?

SONYA. Yes, we are.

They drink and kiss each other

I've wanted to make it up for a long time, but I felt so shy somehow... *(Starts crying.)*

HELEN. What are you crying for?

SONYA. It's nothing.

HELEN. That's enough, that's enough... *(Starts crying.)* Silly old me, I've started crying too.

Pause

You're angry with me because you think I married your father for his money. If you believe in oaths, I swear to you that I married him for love. I was bowled over because he was a famous scholar. It was artificial love, not real, but it seemed real enough to me at the time. It's not my fault. Ever since our wedding you've been punishing me with your clever, suspicious eyes.

SONYA. We've made peace now. Let's forget about that.

HELEN. Don't look at me like that. It's not like you. You must believe people, or life's impossible.

Pause

SONYA. Tell me honestly, as a friend. Are you happy?

HELEN. No.

SONYA. I knew it. And another question. Tell me frankly. Would you like to have a young husband?

HELEN. What a child you are. Of course, I would. *(Laughs.)* Ask me something else, go on...

SONYA. Do you like the doctor?

HELEN. Yes, very much.

SONYA *(laughing).* I've got a silly expression, haven't I? He's just gone, but I can still hear his voice and footsteps. And if I look into a dark window, I can picture his face. Please let me talk to you about it... I shouldn't speak so loudly. It makes me feel embarrassed. Let's go up to my room and talk there. Do you think I'm silly? You do, don't you? Say something about him.

HELEN. What sort of thing?

SONYA. That he's clever. That he can do anything... Make people better, plant forests...

HELEN. Forests and medicine are not the main thing. It's talent, my dear, see! And do you know what talent is? A bold, free mind, breadth of vision... When he plants a tree, he imagines what it will be like in a thousand years' time, and thinks he sees a happy future for all mankind. People like that are rare and should be loved. He drinks and is sometimes rather coarse, but what of it? In Russia a person with talent can't stay blameless. Just imagine what his life is like! Roads knee-deep in mud, frost, blizzards, vast distances, coarse, brutal people, poverty and sickness all around. Anyone who works and struggles day after day in a situation like that would find it hard to stay sober and blameless by the age of forty. *(Kisses her.)* I wish you

happiness with all my heart, you deserve it... *(Gets up.)* I'm a tedious, type-cast sort of person. In music, in my husband's house, and in all my love affairs, I've always been type-cast. In fact, Sonya, come to think of it, I'm very, very unhappy! *(Paces agitatedly round the stage.)* I shall never find happiness in this life. No! Why are you laughing?

SONYA *(laughs, covering her face).* I'm so happy ... so happy!

HELEN. I feel like playing the piano. I'd love to play something now.

SONYA. Then do. *(Embraces her.)* I can't sleep. Play something!

HELEN. Wait a minute. Your father's not asleep. Music irritates him, when he's feeling unwell. Go and ask him. I'll only play, if he doesn't mind. Go on.

SONYA. Alright. *(Goes out.)*

The watchman taps in the garden

HELEN. I haven't played for such a long time. I'll play and weep, weep like a fool. *(Through the window.)* Is that you tapping, Yefim?

The watchman's voice says "Yes"

HELEN. Don't do that, the master's not feeling well.

The watchman's voice says: "Just going! *(Whistles.)* Come on, Blackie. Come on, laddy!"

Pause

SONYA *(returning).* He says no.

Curtain

ACT THREE

A drawing room in Serebryakov's house. Three doors, right, left and in the centre. Afternoon

Voynitsky and Sonya (both seated) and Helen (walking around the stage, thinking about something)

VOYNITSKY. The Herr Professor has graciously requested us to assemble in this drawing room at one o'clock. *(Looks at his watch).* It is now a quarter to. He wishes to make an announcement.

HELEN. Probably some sort of business.

VOYNITSKY. He doesn't have any business. He just writes rubbish, grouses and is jealous all the time, that's all.

SONYA *(reproachfully).* Uncle!

VOYNITSKY. Alright, I'm sorry. *(Points to Helen).* Just look at her. She's so lethargic, she can hardly walk. It's delightful. Really delightful!

HELEN. You nag at me all day long. I wonder you don't get tired of it. *(Plaintively.)* I'm dying of boredom, I just don't know what to do.

SONYA *(shrugging).* There's plenty that needs to be done. If you really want to.

HELEN. Like what?

SONYA. Running the estate, teaching, helping the sick. Isn't that enough? While you and Father were away, Uncle Vanya and I even used to go and sell flour at the market.

HELEN. I can't do that sort of thing. And it's not interesting anyway. It's only in modern novels that people teach and help sick peasants. How on earth could I suddenly start doing that?

SONYA. Well, I don't understand why anyone wouldn't want to go and teach. Wait a bit, you'll get used to it. *(Embraces her.)* Don't be miserable, my darling. *(Laughs.)* You're bored, at a loose end, but boredom and

idleness are infectious. Just look. Uncle Vanya does nothing all day except mooch around after you like a shadow. I've left all my jobs to come and have a chat with you. I've grown so lazy, I can't believe it! Doctor Astrov used to visit us very rarely, about once a month, and it was such a job persuading him to come, but now he turns up every day. He's abandoned his forestry and medicine. You must be a sorceress.

VOYNITSKY. Why are you so dejected? *(Animatedly.)* Be a good girl, my darling, my sweet. There's mermaid's blood flowing in your veins, so why not be a mermaid! Let yourself go for once, fall head over heels in love with a water-sprite and take the plunge. Make the Herr Professor and all of us gape in amazement!

HELEN *(angrily).* Leave me alone! How cruel you are! *(Tries to go out.)*

VOYNITSKY *(stops her).* There, there, my sweet, forgive me. I'm sorry. *(Kisses her hand.) Pax.*

HELEN. It's enough to try an angel's patience, you must admit.

VOYNITSKY. As a sign of peace and harmony I'll bring you a bunch of roses. I made it up for you this morning. Autumn roses, lovely, sad roses. *(Goes out.)*

SONYA. Autumn roses, lovely, sad roses...

They both look out of the window

HELEN. It's September already. How can we spend the whole winter here!

Pause

Where's the doctor?

SONYA. In Uncle Vanya's room. Writing something. I'm glad Uncle Vanya's gone away. I must talk to you.

HELEN. What about?

SONYA. What about? *(Lays her head on Helen's chest.)*

HELEN. There, there, never mind. *(Strokes her hair.)* There, there.

SONYA. I'm not pretty.

HELEN. You've got lovely hair.

SONYA. No! *(Looks round to see herself in the mirror.)* No! When a woman's not pretty people tell her: "You've got lovely eyes, you've got lovely hair..." I've been in love with him for six years now. I love him even more than my mother. All the time I can hear him, feel the press of his hand. I keep looking at the door, waiting for him to appear at any moment. And I keep running to you to talk about him. He visits us every day now, but he never looks at me, doesn't even see me. It's so painful! I haven't the slightest hope, no, no! *(In despair.)* Oh, Lord, give me strength... I prayed all night long. I often go up to him, start talking to him and look into his eyes. I've lost all my pride and self-control... Yesterday I couldn't stop myself from telling Uncle Vanya that I'm in love. All the servants know I love him. Everyone knows.

HELEN. What about him?

SONYA. No. He doesn't notice me.

HELEN *(thoughtfully).* He's a strange person... You know what? Let me have a talk to him... I'll be careful, just hint...

Pause

You can't go on forever not knowing. Will you let me?

Sonya nods her head

That's splendid. It won't be hard to find out whether he's in love or not. Don't be embarrassed, dear, and don't worry. I'll ask him so carefully, he won't even notice. All we want to find out is yes or no.

Pause

If it's no, he should stay away. Shouldn't he?

Sonya nods her head in agreement

It's easier when you don't see him. There's no point in putting it off. We'll find out straightaway. He said he would show me some charts... Go and say I'd like to see him.

SONYA *(deeply agitated).* You will tell me the truth, won't you?

HELEN. Yes, of course. I think the truth whatever it may be is better than uncertainty. You can rely on me, my darling.

SONYA. Yes, yes. I'll tell him you'd like to see his charts. *(She walks to the door and stops by it.)* No, uncertainty is better. You can still hope...

HELEN. What was that?

SONYA. Nothing. *(Goes out.)*

HELEN *(alone).* There's nothing worse than knowing another person's secret and not being able to help. *(Musingly.)* He's not in love with her, that's obvious. But why shouldn't he marry her? She's not pretty, but she would make an excellent wife for a country doctor of his age. She's clever, kind and innocent. No, it wouldn't work, it wouldn't work...

Pause

I understand the poor girl. Amid all this excruciating boredom, when there are grey blobs wandering around instead of real people, when you hear nothing but vulgarities and all people can do is eat, drink and sleep, he suddenly comes along, different from the rest, handsome, interesting, fascinating, like a bright moon rising in a dark sky. To be captivated by the charm of a man like that, to forget oneself... I seem to be slightly infatuated myself. Yes, I'm bored without him and now I'm smiling at the thought of him. Uncle Vanya says I've got mermaid's blood in my veins. "Let yourself go for once!" Well, then? Perhaps I should... Fly away, free as a bird, from all of you, your sleepy faces, your endless conversations, forget

that you exist at all. But I'm too timid, too cowardly. My conscience would torment me. He comes here every day. I can guess why. And I already feel guilty, ready to go down on my knees to Sonya, beg her forgiveness and weep...

ASTROV *(comes in with a chart).* Good afternoon! *(Shakes hands.)* You wanted to see my handiwork, did you?

HELEN. Yesterday you promised to show me some of your work. Are you free now?

ASTROV. Yes, of course. *(Spreads out the chart on a card table and fixes it in place with drawing pins.)* Where were you born?

HELEN *(helping him).* In St Petersburg.

ASTROV. And educated?

HELEN. At the Conservatory.

ASTROV. This will probably not interest you.

HELEN. Why? I don't know the countryside, but I've read a great deal.

ASTROV. I've got my own desk in this house. In Vanya's room. When I feel completely worn out, at the end of my tether, I drop everything and hurry over here to enjoy myself doing this for an hour or two. Vanya and Sonya click away on their abacuses, and I sit by them at my desk, painting. It's warm and peaceful. The cricket's chirping. But I don't allow myself this pleasure very often, only once a month... *(Points at the chart.)* Now look here. This is a chart of our region as it was fifty years ago. The light- and dark-green are the forests. Half the area was covered with forest. Red hatching on the green stands for elk and wild goats. I show both flora and fauna. There used to be swans, geese and ducks on this lake and the place was teeming with all sorts of wild fowl. Hosts of 'em. As well as villages and hamlets, you can see settlements here and there, farmsteads, Old Believers' hermitages, water-mills. There were plenty of cows and horses then. They're shown in pale blue. This part here, for example, with lots

of pale-blue, had whole herds of them. Each homestead owned an average of three horses.

Pause

Now let's look lower down. This is the same district twenty-five years ago. By then only half the area was forested. The wild goats had disappeared, but there were still some elk. The green and light-blue patches are not so dense. And so on and so forth. Now turn to part three, a map of the region in the present day. There are bits of green here and there, but no whole stretches, only patches. The elk, swans and wood grouse have all disappeared. So have the settlements, the farms, hermitages and watermills. The overall picture is of gradual and obvious degeneration which will be complete in another ten to fifteen years time. You may say it is due to cultural influences, that the old life had to give way to the new. And I would agree, if there were roads and railways in place of the ruined forests, if there were factories and schools—the people would be more healthy, prosperous and intelligent. But there's nothing of the sort! The region still has the same marshland and mosquitoes, the same lack of good roads, poverty, typhus, diphtheria and forest fires. This is degeneration caused by an intolerably hard struggle for survival. It is decay due to ignorance and a total lack of self-awareness, when a sick, cold, hungry man, in order to save the little bit of life he has left and protect his children, grabs anything that can warm and feed him, instinctively, unconsciously, destroys with no thought for the morrow. Nearly everything has been destroyed, but nothing created in its place. *(Coldly.)* I see from your face that this doesn't interest you.

HELEN. But I don't understand much about it.

ASTROV. There's nothing to understand. You just don't find it interesting.

HELEN. To tell you the truth, I've got something else on my mind. Forgive me. I need to ask you a few

questions, but I'm embarrassed and don't know how to start.

ASTROV. A few questions?

HELEN. Yes, but quite innocent ones. Let's sit down.

They sit down

It concerns a certain young lady. Let's talk frankly, like good friends, without beating about the bush. Talk and then forget all about it. Alright?

ASTROV. Alright.

HELEN. It's about my step-daughter Sonya. Do you like her?

ASTROV. Yes, I respect her.

HELEN. Do you like her as a woman?

ASTROV *(after a pause).* No.

HELEN. Another few words and then that's all. Have you noticed anything?

ASTROV. No.

HELEN *(takes him by the hand).* You're not in love with her. I can see it from your eyes. She's suffering... You shouldn't come here any more.

ASTROV *(stands up).* I'm too old for that sort of thing now. And too busy. *(Shrugs.)* Where could I find the time? *(He is embarrassed.)*

HELEN. Ugh! What an unpleasant conversation! I'm trembling all over, as if I'd been carrying a ton weight. Thank goodness that's the end of it. Let's forget about it, as if it had never happened, and ... you go away now. You're a clever man, you'll understand...

Pause

I'm even blushing.

ASTROV. If you had told me this a month or two ago, I might have thought about it, but now... *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* Still, if it's painful for her, of course... There's only one thing I don't understand. Why did you need to ask

these questions? *(Looks her straight in the eye and wags a finger.)* You're a sly one!

HELEN. What do you mean?

ASTROV *(laughing).* You're a sly one! Suppose Sonya is suffering, and I admit that she may be, but why all these questions? *(Stops her from speaking, animatedly.)* And don't pretend to be surprised. You know perfectly well why I come here every day. Why I come and who I come for, you know perfectly well. Don't look at me like that, my sweet bird of prey, I'm an old cock sparrow.

HELEN *(bewildered).* Bird of prey? I don't understand.

ASTROV. My beautiful fluffy weasel. You must have a victim! I haven't done a stroke of work for a whole month. Just dropped everything to go looking for you frantically. And you love that, you really do! *(Crosses his arms and bows his head).* I surrender. Eat me!

HELEN. You must be out of your mind!

ASTROV *(laughing through clenched teeth).* Now you're being coy.

HELEN. Oh, I'm better and nobler than you think! I swear to you! *(Tries to leave.)*

ASTROV *(barring the way).* I'll leave today and never come back again, but... *(Takes her by the hand and looks round.)* Where shall we meet? Tell me quickly, where? Someone might come in, tell me quickly. *(Passionately.)* You gorgeous, wonderful woman! Just one kiss. I must just kiss your sweet-smelling hair.

HELEN. I swear to you...

ASTROV *(stops her speaking).* Why swear? No need to do that. No need for all this talk. How lovely you are! What beautiful hands! *(Kisses her hands.)*

HELEN. That's enough. You really must go. *(Takes her hands away.)* You're forgetting yourself.

ASTROV. Tell me, where shall we meet tomorrow? *(Puts his arms round her waist.)* You see, it's inevitable, we must meet. *(Kisses her. At that moment Voynitsky*

comes in with a bunch of roses and stops by the door.)

HELEN *(not noticing Voynitsky).* For pity's sake ... leave me alone... *(Lays her head on Astrov's chest.)* No! *(Tries to leave.)*

ASTROV *(holding her by the waist).* Come to the plantation tomorrow ... about two... Yes? Yes? Will you come?

HELEN *(catching sight of Voynitsky).* Let me go! *(Walks over to the window, very embarrassed.)* This is dreadful.

VOYNITSKY *(puts the roses down on a chair; wipes his face and neck with a handkerchief, agitatedly.)* Never mind... Yes... Never mind...

ASTROV *(morosely).* The weather's not bad today, my dear Ivan Petrovich. It was cloudy this morning and looked like rain, but now the sun's come out. In fact, we're having a splendid autumn ... and the winter crops are coming along nicely. *(Rolls up his chart.)* The only trouble is the days are getting shorter... *(Goes out.)*

HELEN *(walks quickly over to Voynitsky).* Please do your very best to see that my husband and I leave here today. Do you hear me? Today!

VOYNITSKY *(wiping his face).* What was that? Oh, yes ... alright. I saw everything, Hélène, everything...

HELEN *(nervily).* Do you hear me? I must leave here today!

Enter Serebryakov, Sonya, Telegin and Marina

TELEGIN. I'm not feeling too good myself, Your Excellency. I've been under the weather for two days now. It's my head...

SEREBRYAKOV. Where are the others? I don't like this house. It's like a maze. Twenty-six huge rooms, everybody wanders off and then you can't find them. *(Rings the bell).* Ask Maria Vasilievna and my wife to come down.

HELEN. I'm here.

SEREBRYAKOV. Please be seated, ladies and gentlemen.

SONYA *(goes up to Helen, impatiently).* What did he say?

HELEN. I'll tell you later.

SONYA. You're trembling? You're upset? *(Stares hard at her face.)* I understand. He said he wouldn't come here again, didn't he?

Pause

Tell me, did he?

Helen nods

SEREBRYAKOV *(to Telegin).* A person can put up with bad health, but what I really can't stand is living in the country. I feel as if I've fallen off the earth onto some strange planet. Sit down, ladies and gentlemen, please. Sonya!

Sonya does not hear him. She stands, hanging her head sadly.

Sonya!

Pause

She can't hear. *(To Marina).* You sit down too, Nanny.

The Nanny sits down and starts knitting a stocking

Now then, ladies and gentlemen. Kindly hang your ears on the nail of attention, as they say. *(Laughs.)*

VOYNITSKY *(agitatedly).* Perhaps you don't need me? May I go?

SEREBRYAKOV. No, we need you most of all.

VOYNITSKY. What do you want of me?

SEREBRYAKOV. Want of you? Why are you so annoyed?

Pause

If I've offended you in any way, please forgive me.

VOYNITSKY. You needn't speak in that tone. Let's get on with it. What do you want?

Enter Maria Vasilievna

SEREBRYAKOV. And here is *maman.* I'll begin, ladies and gentlemen.

Pause

I have invited you here, ladies and gentlemen, to inform you that an inspector-general is coming. But, joking apart, this is a serious matter. I have assembled you here, ladies and gentlemen, to request your assistance and advice and, knowing as I do how obliging you invariably are, I hope to receive them. I am a scholar, a man far removed from the practical side of life. I cannot manage without the counsel of experienced people and am therefore asking you, Ivan Petrovich, you, Ilya Ilyich, and you, *maman*... The fact of the matter is that *manet omnes una nox,* that is to say, we're all human. I am old and ill and therefore think it's time to put my property matters in order insofar as they concern my family. My life is already finished, so I am not thinking of myself, but I have a young wife and an unmarried daughter.

Pause

It is impossible for me to go on living in the country. We were not made for the countryside. It is also impossible to live in the town on the income we receive from this estate. If we were to sell the forest, say, that would be an exceptional measure which could not be used every year. We must find some measures which would guarantee us a steady, more or less fixed income. I have thought of such a measure and have the honour to propose it for your discussion. Without going into detail, I shall merely outline it in general. Our estate yields an average income of not

more than two per cent. I suggest selling it. If we invest the money from the sale in interest-bearing securities, we shall get about four to five per cent, and I think there will even be a few thousand left over which would enable us to buy a small country house in Finland.

VOYNITSKY. Wait a moment. I don't think I can have heard right. Would you repeat what you just said.

SEREBRYAKOV. Invest the money in interest-bearing securities and use what's left over to buy a country house in Finland.

VOYNITSKY. Not about Finland. You said something else.

SEREBRYAKOV. I suggest selling the estate.

VOYNITSKY. Yes, that's it. So you want to sell the estate, eh? That's splendid, a brilliant idea. And where do you suggest I should go with my elderly mother and Sonya here?

SEREBRYAKOV. We'll discuss that when the time comes. We can't do everything at once.

VOYNITSKY. Wait a moment. I obviously didn't have a grain of common sense before. Up till now I was stupid enough to think that the estate belonged to Sonya. My late father bought it as a dowry for my sister. Up till now I naively assumed that the law meant what it said, and that after my sister's death the estate went to Sonya.

SEREBRYAKOV. Yes, the estate does belong to Sonya. No one is disputing that. I would not venture to sell it without her consent. What is more, I am proposing to do this for Sonya's good.

VOYNITSKY. It's incredible, quite incredible! Either I've gone mad, or ... or...

MARIA. Don't contradict Alexander, Jean. He knows better than us what is right and what is wrong.

VOYNITSKY. No, give me some water. *(Drinks the water.)* Say what you like, anything you like!

SEREBRYAKOV. I can't understand why you're so

worked up. I don't say my plan is ideal. If everyone is against it, I won't insist.

Pause

TELEGIN *(embarrassed).* I feel not only respect, but a certain kinship for learning, Your Excellency. The brother of my brother Grigory's wife, Konstantin Trofimovich Lakedemonov, I make so bold to say, was an M. A.

VOYNITSKY. Not now, Waffles, we're talking business. Later on... *(To Serebryakov.)* Ask him. This estate was bought from his uncle.

SEREBRYAKOV. Why should I ask him? What for?

VOYNITSKY. This estate was bought for what was then ninety-five thousand roubles. Father paid seventy and owed the remaining twenty-five thousand. Now listen. We couldn't have bought the estate, if I hadn't renounced my share of the inheritance in favour of my sister whom I loved dearly. What is more, I worked like an ox for ten years to pay off the debt...

SEREBRYAKOV. I wish I'd never started this conversation.

VOYNITSKY. The estate is free of debt and in good order only thanks to my personal efforts. And now that I'm old, they want to throw me out of here on my neck!

SEREBRYAKOV. I don't see the point of all this.

VOYNITSKY. For twenty-five years I've managed this estate, working hard and sending you money like the most conscientious steward, and you've never given me a word of thanks. All that time—as a young man and now—I've been getting a salary of five hundred roubles a year from you—a mere pittance! And you've never once thought of putting it up by a single rouble!

SEREBRYAKOV. Vanya, how on earth should I know? I'm not a practical person. I don't understand things like that. You could have put it up yourself as much as you wanted.

VOYNITSKY. You mean why didn't I steal? Why don't you all despise me for not stealing? It would have been fair, and I wouldn't be a pauper now!

MARIA *(sternly).* Jean!

TELEGIN *(worriedly).* Don't, Vanya, my dear friend, don't! I've gone all shaky. Why upset a nice relationship? *(Kisses him.)* Please don't.

VOYNITSKY. For twenty-five years I've been encased like a mole with this mother of mine in these four walls. All our thoughts and feelings centred round you alone. We spent the days talking about you and your works, taking pride in you, uttering your name with awe. And wasted the nights reading journals and books for which I now feel the utmost contempt!

TELEGIN. Don't, Vanya, please don't. I can't...

SEREBRYAKOV *(angrily).* I don't know what you want.

VOYNITSKY. You were a being of a higher order in our eyes, and we knew your articles by heart. But now my eyes have been opened! I can see everything! You write about art, yet you don't understand the first thing about it! All your works which I worshipped are not worth a brass farthing! You've been deceiving us all the time!

SEREBRYAKOV. Do make him stop, everyone. Or I'll have to leave!

HELEN. I demand that you be quiet, Ivan Petrovich. Do you hear?

VOYNITSKY. I won't be quiet! *(Barring Serebryakov's way.)* Wait, I haven't finished yet! You've ruined my life! I've never lived, never lived! Thanks to you I destroyed, annihilated the best years of my life! You are my worst enemy!

TELEGIN. I can't stand it. I really can't. I'm going... *(Goes out extremely upset.)*

SEREBRYAKOV. What do you want of me? And what

right have you to speak to me in that tone? You nobody! If the estate's yours, take it. I don't need it!

HELEN. I must get out of this hell this very minute. *(Shouts.)* I can't stand it any longer!

VOYNITSKY. My life's been wasted! I'm talented, clever, brave... If I'd lived a normal life, I might have become a Schopenhauer or a Dostoyevsky. I don't know what I'm saying. I'm going mad. Mother, I'm in despair! Mother!

MARIA *(sternly).* Do as Alexander says.

SONYA *(kneels down in front of Marina and snuggles up to her.)* Nanny! Nanny!

VOYNITSKY. Mother! What must I do? Don't tell me. There's no need. I know myself what I must do! *(To Serebryakov.)* You won't forget me in a hurry. *(Goes out through middle door.)*

Maria follows him

SEREBRYAKOV. What is going on, everybody? Take that madman away from me! I can't bear to be under the same roof as him! He lives in there *(pointing to the middle door)* almost next door to me... Get him to move to the village, or into the wing, or I'll move there, but I can't stay in the same house as him.

HELEN *(to her husband).* We're leaving here today! We must give instructions straightaway.

SEREBRYAKOV. Worthless nobody!

SONYA *(still kneeling, turns to face her father; with emotion through tears).* You must be merciful, Father! Uncle Vanya and I are so unhappy! *(Trying to restrain her despair.)* You must be merciful! Remember how Uncle Vanya and Grandma used to stay up all night, when you were younger, translating books for you and copying out your papers—all night and every night! Uncle Vanya and I worked day in day out, afraid to spend a penny on ourselves, and sent it all to you. We earned our daily bread

alright! I shouldn't be saying this, I know, but you must understand us, Father. You must be merciful!

HELEN *(agitatedly, to her husband).* Do go and make it up with him, Alexander. I beg you.

SEREBRYAKOV. Alright, I will. I'm not blaming him for anything and I'm not angry, but you must admit, his behaviour is strange to say the least of it. I'll go and see him now. *(Goes out through the middle door.)*

HELEN. Be gentle with him, reassure him... *(Goes out after him.)*

SONYA *(huddling up to Marina).* Nanny! Dear Nanny!

MARINA. There, there, girlie. The geese'll calm down when they've had their cackle. They'll calm down when they've had their cackle.

SONYA. Nanny!

MARINA *(stroking her head).* You're shivering as if it's winter! Never mind, my little orphan girl, God is merciful. A nice drink of lime-flower tea or some hot raspberry and you'll be right as rain. Don't be upset, my little orphan girl. *(Looking at the middle door, angrily.)* What a din those ganders are makin', confound the lot of 'em!

There is a shot off-stage, followed by a scream from Helen. Sonya shudders

Ugh, confound you!

SEREBRYAKOV *(rushes in, staggering with fright).* Stop him! Stop him! He's gone mad!

Helen and Voynitsky struggle in the doorway

HELEN *(trying to wrest the revolver away from him).* Let me have it! Let me have it, I tell you!

VOYNITSKY. Let me go, Hélène! Let me go! *(Breaks free, runs in and looks around for Serebryakov).* Where is he? Ah, there he is! *(Fires at him.)* Bang!

Pause

Did I miss him? Again?! *(Angrily.)* Dammit! Damn and blast it! *(Bangs the floor with the revolver and flops down exhausted. Serebryakov is thunderstruck. Helen leans against the wall, feeling dizzy.)*

HELEN. Take me away from here! Take me away! For God's sake! I just can't stay here any longer.

VOYNITSKY *(in despair).* Oh, what have I done? What have I done?

SONYA *(quietly).* Nanny! Dear Nanny!

Curtain

ACT FOUR

Voynitsky's room, which serves as his bedroom and the estate office. By the window is a large table with ledgers and various papers, a writing desk, cupboards and a set of scales. There is a smaller table for Astrov with drawing materials, paints and a file next to them. A bird-cage with a starling. On the wall is a map of Africa, obviously of no use to anyone here. A huge divan upholstered with oil-cloth. On the left is a door leading to other rooms; on the right a door to the lobby. By the right-hand door is a mat for the peasants to wipe their boots. A quiet autumn evening. Telegin and Marina (sitting opposite each other and winding stocking wool)

TELEGIN. Hurry up, or they'll be calling us to say goodbye. They've ordered the carriage already.

MARINA *(trying to wind faster).* Nearly finished.

TELEGIN. They're leaving for Kharkov. Going to live there.

MARINA. And a good thing too.

TELEGIN. Got the wind up. "I won't live here another minute," says the Professor's wife. "We must leave at once," she says. "When we've lived for a while in Kharkov and looked round the place, we'll send for our things."

They're travelling light. So they're not destined to live here. Not destined to. Fate did not will it.

MARINA. And a good thing too. What with all that noise they were makin', and the shootin' too! It's a fair disgrace!

TELEGIN. Yes, a subject worthy of Aivazovsky's brush.

MARINA. It's a cryin' shame.

Pause

We'll get back to the good old ways again. Mornin' tea between seven and eight, lunch at midday, supper in the evening. Like all good Christian folk, everythin' just as it should be. *(Sighs.)* Can't remember when I last had noodles, sinner that I am.

TELEGIN. Yes, we haven't had noodles for ages.

Pause

For ages... I was walking through the village this morning, and the shopkeeper shouted after me: "Hey, you old sponger!" I felt so upset!

MARINA. Don't take no notice of that. We all sponge on God. No one sits idle. We all work hard, you, and Sonya, and Ivan Petrovich. Everyone... Where's Sonya?

TELEGIN. In the garden. She and the doctor are looking for Ivan Petrovich. They're afraid he might do himself an injury.

MARINA. Where's his pistol?

TELEGIN *(in a whisper).* I hid it in the cellar!

MARINA *(with a smile).* Well, I never!

Enter Voynitsky and Astrov from the yard

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone. *(To Marina and Telegin.)* Go away and let me have at least an hour on my own. I can't stand being watched over.

TELEGIN. Right you are, Vanya. *(Tiptoes out.)*

MARINA. Cackle, cackle, cackle, gander! *(Gathers up her wool and goes out.)*

VOYNITSKY. Please leave me alone!

ASTROV. With the greatest of pleasure. I should have left long ago, but, I repeat, I'm not going anywhere until you give me back what you took from me.

VOYNITSKY. I didn't take anything from you.

ASTROV. I'm not joking. Don't hold me up any more. I should have left long ago.

VOYNITSKY. I didn't take anything from you.

They both sit down

ASTROV. You didn't? Very well, I'll wait a bit longer and then, forgive me, but I shall have to use force. We'll tie you up and search you. I'm perfectly serious.

VOYNITSKY. As you like.

Pause

Fancy being so stupid: shooting twice and missing both times! I'll never forgive myself!

ASTROV. If you felt like shooting, you could have put a bullet through your own forehead.

VOYNITSKY *(shrugging).* It's strange. I tried to kill someone, yet I haven't been arrested or taken to court. They must think I'm mad. *(Laughs angrily.)* I'm mad, yet people who hide their dull, mediocre mind and utter heartlessness under the guise of a professor, a learned sage, are not. Neither are women who marry old men and then deceive them in front of all and sundry. I saw you embracing her!

ASTROV. Alright, so I embraced her. And so much for you. *(Cocks a snook at him.)*

VOYNITSKY *(looking at the door).* The earth must be mad to support you after that!

ASTROV. That's plain stupid.

VOYNITSKY. Well, if I'm mad and not responsible for my actions, I have the right to say stupid things.

ASTROV. I've heard that one before. You're not mad, you're just a crank. A buffoon. I used to think every crank was sick, abnormal, but now I believe it's normal for a person to be a crank. So you're perfectly normal.

VOYNITSKY *(covers his face with his hands).* I feel so ashamed! If only you knew how ashamed I feel! This acute sense of shame is far worse than any pain. *(With anguish.)* It's unbearable! *(Leans towards the table.)* What shall I do? What shall I do?

ASTROV. Nothing.

VOYNITSKY. Give me something! For Heaven's sake... I'm forty-seven. If I live to the age of sixty, say, I've got another thirteen years to go. That's ages! How shall I get through those thirteen years? What shall I do? How shall I fill them up? Do try to understand ... *(presses Astrov's hand convulsively)* if only I could live the rest of my life in a different way. Wake up one calm clear morning and feel that I've made a new start, that the past has been forgotten, drifted away like smoke. *(Weeps.)* Start a new life... Tell me how to start ... where to start...

ASTROV *(irritably).* Oh, for goodness sake! What new life! Our predicament, yours and mine, is hopeless.

VOYNITSKY. Really?

ASTROV. I'm convinced of it.

VOYNITSKY. Please give me something... *(Points to his heart.)* It's burning here.

ASTROV *(shouting angrily).* Shut up! *(More gently.)* The people who live after us in a hundred or two hundred years' time and despise us for having lived our lives so stupidly and tastelessly, they may find a way of being happy, but not us... You and I have one hope only. The hope that when we are in our graves, visions will come to us, perhaps even pleasant ones. *(Sighs.)* Yes, old boy. There were only two decent, intelligent people in the whole

district, me and you. But ten years of this contemptible philistine existence has swallowed us up. It has poisoned our blood with its putrid vapours, and we have become as worthless as everyone else. *(Animatedly.)* But don't you try to get round me. Give me back what you took from me.

VOYNITSKY. I didn't take anything from you.

ASTROV. You took a phial of morphine from my first-aid kit.

Pause

Listen, if you really must bump yourself off, go into the woods and shoot yourself there. But give me back the morphine, or there'll be all sorts of rumours and gossip. People'll think I gave it to you... Having to do the post-mortem will be quite enough for me, thank you. Do you think that's fun?

Enter Sonya

VOYNITSKY. Leave me alone.

ASTROV *(to Sonya).* Your Uncle's taken a phial of morphine from my first-aid chest, and he won't give it back. Tell him that was ... not a clever thing to do. And I'm in a hurry. It's time I went.

SONYA. Did you take the morphine, Uncle Vanya?

Pause

ASTROV. Yes, he did. I'm sure of it.

SONYA. Give it back. Why frighten us like that? *(Tenderly.)* Give it back, Uncle Vanya! I may be just as unhappy as you, but I don't despair. I put up with it and I always will, until my life ends of its own accord. So you put up with it too.

Pause

Give it back! *(Kisses his hand.)* My dear, fine, sweet Uncle, give it back! *(Weeps.)* You're kind. You'll take pity

on us and give it back. Don't despair, Uncle! Don't despair!

VOYNITSKY *(gets the phial out of a drawer and hands it to Astrov).* Here, take it! *(To Sonya).* But we must get down to work straightaway, do something at once, or I can't ... I can't...

SONYA. Yes, yes, get down to work. As soon as we've seen them off, we'll start work. *(Sorts through the papers on the table nervily.)* Everything's been neglected.

ASTROV *(puts the phial into his case and does up the straps).* Now I can be on my way.

HELEN *(comes in).* Are you here, Ivan Petrovich? We're leaving in a minute. Go and see Alexander. He has something to say to you.

SONYA. Come on, Uncle Vanya. *(Takes Voynitsky by the arm.)* Let's go. You and Father must make it up. It's essential.

Sonya and Voynitsky go out

HELEN. I'm going away. *(Offers Astrov her hand.)* Goodbye.

ASTROV. Already?

HELEN. The carriage is waiting.

ASTROV. Goodbye.

HELEN. You promised me today that you would leave here.

ASTROV. I know. I'm going now.

Pause

So you got scared? *(Takes her hand.)* Is it really so frightening?

HELEN. Yes.

ASTROV. Why not stay, eh? Tomorrow at the plantation...

HELEN. No. It's settled. I couldn't look at you so bravely if I wasn't sure we were leaving. There's one thing

I want to ask of you. Think better of me. I should like you to respect me.

ASTROV. Bah! *(Gestures impatiently.)* Do stay, please. Admit it, you've got nothing to do, no aim in life, nothing to occupy your mind. Sooner or later, you are bound to give way to your feelings, it's inevitable. And it would be better here, in the lap of nature, than in Kharkov or somewhere in Kursk. It's poetic here at least, and the autumn is even beautiful. There's the plantation and some semi-ruined country estates à la Turgenev...

HELEN. How funny you are... I'm angry with you, but all the same... I'll remember you with pleasure. You're an interesting, original person. You and I will never see each other again, so—why conceal it? I even got infatuated with you a little. Let's shake hands and part friends. No hard feelings.

ASTROV *(shakes hands).* Yes, you'd better go... *(Thoughtfully.)* You seem a good, warm-hearted person, yet there's something strange about you. You come here with your husband, and everyone who has been working here doing the best they can to create something, has to drop what they are doing and devote the whole summer to your husband's gout and you exclusively. The two of you have infected the lot of us with your idleness. I fell in love and did nothing for a whole month. In that time people were ill, peasants grazed their cattle in my forest, my young plantations... You and your husband bring destruction with you wherever you go... I'm joking, of course, but all the same ... it's strange, but I'm sure if you were to stay the havoc would be enormous. It would be the ruin of me, and you wouldn't have much of a time either. Off you go then. *Finita la commedia!*

HELEN *(takes a pencil from his table and hides it quickly).* I'm taking this pencil as a memento.

ASTROV. It's strange... We've got to know each other and suddenly for some reason ... we'll never meet again.

That's the way things are... While there's no one here, before Uncle Vanya comes in with a bunch of flowers, let me ... kiss you ... goodbye... May I? *(Kisses her on the cheek.)* There ... that's splendid.

HELEN. I wish you all the very best. *(Looks round.)* Why shouldn't I for once in my life! *(Embraces him impetuously, and they step apart quickly.)* I must go.

ASTROV. Yes, go now. If the horses are ready, leave at once.

HELEN. I think someone's coming.

They both listen

ASTROV. *Finita!*

Enter Serebryakov, Voynitsky, Maria with a book, Telegin and Sonya

SEREBRYAKOV *(to Voynitsky.)* Let bygones be bygones. After what has happened, in these few hours I've thought and endured so much that I think I could write a whole treatise for the edification of posterity on how to live. I gladly accept your apologies and ask you to forgive me too. Goodbye! *(Kisses Voynitsky three times).*

VOYNITSKY. You'll receive exactly what you were sent before. Everything will be just as it was.

Helen embraces Sonya

SEREBRYAKOV *(kisses Maria's hand). Maman...*

MARIA *(kisses him).* Alexander, do have your photo taken again and send me one. You know how much you mean to me.

TELEGIN. Goodbye, Your Excellency! Don't forget us!

SEREBRYAKOV *(kisses his daughter).* Goodbye. Goodbye everyone! *(Holds out his hand to Astrov).* Thank you for your pleasant company... I respect your way of thinking, your interests and enthusiasm, but allow an old

man to add one remark to his farewell speech. You must get down to some real hard work, ladies and gentlemen! Some real hard work! *(Bows all round).* All the best! *(Goes out, followed by Maria and Sonya.)*

VOYNITSKY *(kisses Helen's hand hard).* Goodbye. Forgive me. We'll never meet again.

HELEN *(moved).* Goodbye, my dear. *(Kisses him on the head and goes out.)*

ASTROV *(to Telegin).* Tell them to bring my horses too, while they're about it, Waffles.

TELEGIN. Certainly, old boy. *(Goes out.)*

Only Astrov and Voynitsky are left

ASTROV *(takes the paints off the table and puts them in his case).* Why don't you go and see them off?

VOYNITSKY. Let them go. I... I can't see them off. I feel awful. I must do something to keep me busy... Work, work! *(Rummages around in the papers on the table.)*

Pause; the sound of bells

ASTROV. They've gone. I bet the Professor's glad. Wild horses wouldn't drag him back here.

MARINA *(comes in).* They've gone. *(Sits down in a chair and starts knitting a stocking.)*

SONYA *(comes in).* They've gone. *(Wipes her eyes).* God grant everything will be alright. *(To her uncle.)* Come on, Uncle Vanya, let's get down to something.

VOYNITSKY. We must work, work.

SONYA. It's a long time since we sat together at this table. *(Lights the lamp on the table.)* I think the ink's run out... *(Takes the inkwell to the cupboard and fills it with ink.)* I feel sad that they've gone.

MARIA *(comes in slowly).* They've gone! *(Sits down and buries herself in her reading.)*

SONYA *(sits down at the table and leafs through a ledger).* First of all, we must write out our bills, Uncle

Vanya. Everything's been dreadfully neglected. Someone asked for his bill again today. You write one, and I'll write the next...

VOYNITSKY *(writes).* "Delivered to..."

They write in silence

MARINA *(yawns).* I feel like a nice bit of shut-eye...

ASTROV. It's so warm and cosy here, with the quiet, the scratching pens and the cricket chirping. I don't want to leave.

The sound of harness bells

They're bringing my horses. So there's nothing left but to say goodbye to you, my friends, and to my table, and be on my way! *(Puts his charts into the file.)*

MARINA. Why be in such a hurry? Stay a bit longer.

ASTROV. I can't.

VOYNITSKY *(writes).* "Still outstanding, two roubles seventy five..."

Enter a workman

WORKMAN. The horses are ready, sir.

ASTROV. I heard them. *(Hands him his first-aid kit, suitcase and file.)* Here, take this. Mind you don't bend the file.

WORKMAN. Yessir. *(Goes out.)*

ASTROV. Well, everyone. *(Walks over to say goodbye.)*

SONYA. When shall we see you again?

ASTROV. Probably not before next summer. Not this winter, I expect... If anything happens, let me know, and I'll come, of course. *(Shakes her hand.)* Thanks for your hospitality and kindness ... for everything. *(Goes over to Marina and kisses her on the head.)* Goodbye, old girl.

MARINA. Goin' before you've had a drink of tea?

ASTROV. I don't want one, Nanny.

MARINA. How about a drop of vodka then?
ASTROV *(hesitating).* Perhaps...

Marina goes out

(After a pause.) One of my horses seems to have gone lame. I noticed it yesterday, when Petrushka took it to water.

VOYNITSKY. You must have it reshod.

ASTROV. I'll have to call in at the smithy in Rozhdestvenskoye. Can't be helped. *(Walks up to the map of Africa and looks at it.)* I bet it's sweltering hot there in Africa now, eh?

VOYNITSKY. Yes, I expect so.

MARINA *(returns with a tray carrying a glass of vodka and a piece of bread).* Here you are.

Astrov drinks the vodka

Your good health, sir. *(With a low bow.)* Why don't you have the bread too?

ASTROV. No, I won't bother... Well, all the best! *(To Marina.)* Don't see me off, Nanny. There's no need. *(He goes out. Sonya follows him with a candle to see him off. Marina sits down in her chair.)*

VOYNITSKY *(writes).* "2 February, 20 lbs of vegetable oil... 16 February, another 20 lbs of vegetable oil... Buckwheat..."

Pause
Sound of harness bells

MARINA. He's gone.

Pause

SONYA *(returns and puts the candle on the table).* He's gone.

VOYNITSKY *(adds up on the abacus and writes down).* Total: fifteen roubles twenty-five...

Sonya sits down and starts writing

MARINA *(yawns.)* Forgive us our trespasses.

Telegin tiptoes in, sits down by the door and tunes his guitar quietly

VOYNITSKY *(to Sonya, stroking her hair).* I'm so unhappy, my child! If only you knew how unhappy I am!

SONYA. Never mind, we must go on living!

Pause

We'll go on living, Uncle Vanya. We'll live through a long, long line of days and endless evenings. We'll endure patiently the trials sent to us by fate. We'll work for others now and in old age, without respite, and when our time comes, we'll die meekly and there, beyond the grave, we'll say that we suffered, that we wept, that things were hard for us, and God will take pity on us, and you and I, Uncle, dear Uncle, shall see a bright, beautiful, gracious life. We shall find joy and look back on our present misfortunes with a tender smile—and we shall rest at last. I believe that, Uncle, deeply and passionately... *(Kneels before him and puts her head on his hands; in an exhausted voice.)* We shall rest at last!

Telegin plays the guitar quietly

We shall rest at last! We shall hear the angels and see the heavens covered with diamonds, we shall see all earthly evil, all our sufferings, drowned in the compassion which fills the world, and our life will grow tranquil, gentle and sweet as a caress. I believe that, I really do... *(Wipes his tears with her handkerchief.)* You're crying, poor, poor Uncle Vanya. *(Tearfully.)* You've never known any joy in

your life, but wait, Uncle Vanya, wait... We shall rest at last... *(Embraces him.)* We shall rest!

The night watchman taps
Telegin plays quietly; Maria jots something down in the margin of her pamphlet; Marina knits her stocking

We shall rest!

The curtain comes down slowly

1897

THE THREE SISTERS

A drama in four acts

CHARACTERS

ANDREI PROZOROV
NATASHA, his fiancée, later his wife
OLGA
MASHA his sisters
IRINA
FYODOR KULYGIN, a schoolmaster, Masha's husband
COLONEL ALEXANDER VERSHININ, a battery commander
BARON TUSENBACH, a lieutenant
VASSILY SOLYONY, a subaltern
IVAN CHEBUTYKIN, an army doctor
FEDOTIK, a second lieutenant
RODÉ, a second lieutenant
FERAPONT, the old watchman from the local council
ANFISSA, the Prozorovs' eighty-year-old nanny

The action takes place in a provincial centre

ACT ONE

The Prozorovs' house. A drawing-room with a colonnade separating it from the large dining-hall in the background. It is noon on a bright, sunny day. The table in the dining-hall is being laid for lunch.

Olga in the dark-blue regulation dress of a schoolmistress is walking about, marking exercise books. Masha in a black dress with a hat on her lap is sitting, reading a book. Irina in a white dress stands day-dreaming

OLGA. It's exactly a year ago today that Father died, the fifth of May—your birthday, Irina. It was snowing then and awfully cold. I thought I'd never live through it, and you were lying in a dead faint. But a year has passed and now we can talk about it quite naturally. You are wearing white again and your face is radiant. *(The clock strikes noon.)* The clock struck then, too. *(Pause.)* I remember the military band and the salute at the cemetery as they carried Father's coffin. He was a general, in command of a brigade, but not many people came. Still, it was raining hard as well. Raining and snowing.

IRINA. Why talk about it?

Baron Tusenbach, Chebutykin and Solyony appear by the table in the hall behind the colonnade

OLGA. It's warm today—we can have the windows wide open—but the birch trees aren't in leaf yet. It's eleven years since Father was given a brigade and we all left Moscow. I remember it clearly. At this time of the year, the beginning of May, everything was in bloom in Moscow. It was warm and bathed in sunlight. Eleven years have passed, yet I still remember everything there as if we had left yesterday. Oh, dear! This morning I woke up and saw the light streaming in, the spring, and my heart leapt for joy, and I longed to be back home!

CHEBUTYKIN. Like hell you did!

TUSENBACH. It's all nonsense, of course.

Masha whistles a tune softly, musing over her book

OLGA. Please don't whistle, Masha. How can you! *(Pause.)* It's being at school all day and then giving private

lessons that gives me these constant headaches and makes me feel like an old woman. In these four years that I have been teaching at the school I really have felt the youth and strength draining out of me, drop by drop. And my one dream growing stronger all the time...

IRINA. To go back to Moscow! To sell the house, have done with everything here and go back to Moscow...

OLGA. Yes! To go back to Moscow, as soon as possible.

Chebutykin and Tusenbach laugh

IRINA. Andrei will be a professor. He would never agree to settle here for good. But poor Masha will have to stay.

OLGA. Masha will come and spend the whole summer with us each year.

Masha whistles softly

IRINA. Let's hope everything works out all right. *(Looking out of the window.)* It's lovely weather today, I don't know why but I feel so bright and gay! This morning I remembered it was my birthday and felt a sudden surge of joy, I thought of the time when I was little and Mother was still alive. And I kept thinking the most wonderful, wonderful things.

OLGA. You are looking radiant today, remarkably lovely. And Masha is lovely, too. Andrei would be quite handsome, but he's put on weight and it doesn't suit him. And I've grown older and much thinner, probably because I get angry with the girls at school. But today I'm free, I'm at home, my head doesn't ache, and I feel younger than I did yesterday. I'm only twenty-eight, after all... Everything is all right, everything is as the good Lord wills, but I do think it would be better if I were married and stayed at home all day. *(Pause.)* I should love my husband.

TUSENBACH *(to Solyony).* What nonsense you talk.

I'm sick of listening to you. *(Coming into the drawing-room.)* I forgot to tell you. Our new battery commander, Colonel Vershinin, is coming to visit you today. *(Sits down at the piano.)*

OLGA. Oh, that will be nice.

IRINA. Is he old?

TUSENBACH. Not particularly. Forty to forty-five at the most. *(Plays softly.)* Seems a nice enough fellow. Not stupid—that's for sure. But he does talk rather a lot.

IRINA. Is he an interesting person?

TUSENBACH. Yes, fairly, except that he has a wife, a mother-in-law, and two little girls. It's his second wife, what's more. Everywhere he goes he announces that he has a wife and two daughters. He'll say so here as well. His wife's a bit batty. Wears her hair in a long, virginal plait, talks very high-falutin', philosophises a lot, and tries to commit suicide every so often, evidently just to spite her husband. I would have left a woman like that long ago, but he just complains and puts up with it.

SOLYONY *(coming into the drawing-room from the hall with Chebutykin).* I can only lift half a hundred-weight with one hand, but with both hands I can lift almost two. From which I conclude that two men are not only twice but three times as strong as one, even more...

CHEBUTYKIN *(walks in reading the newspaper).* For thinning hair ... half an ounce of naphthalene to half a bottle of spirit. Dissolve and apply daily. *(Scribbles in his notebook.)* Right, we'll make a note of that! *(To Solyony.)* Well, as I was saying. The cork fits into the bottle and has a glass tube running through it. Then you take a pinch of ordinary alum...

IRINA. Doctor Chebutykin! Dear Doctor Chebutykin!

CHEBUTYKIN. What is it, my darling girl.

IRINA. Tell me why I'm so happy today. It's as if I were in a sailing boat under a bright blue sky with big white birds above me. Why is it?

CHEBUTYKIN *(kisses both her hands, tenderly).* My little white bird...

IRINA. When I woke up this morning, got out of bed and washed, I suddenly felt as if I understood everything in the world and knew how to live. Dear Doctor Chebutykin, I know absolutely everything. A person must work, work in the sweat of his brow, no matter who he is, and this will give his life meaning, give him happiness, joy, and an aim in life. How fine to be a labourer who gets up at the crack of dawn and lays cobble stones in the street, or a shepherd, or a schoolmaster who teaches children, or an engine driver on the railway. And it's even better to be an ox or a horse, who do a good day's work than a young woman who gets up at midday, has coffee in bed, then takes two hours to get dressed. How dreadful that is! You know how you thirst for a drink on a hot day? Well, that's how I long to work. And if I don't get up early and do a full day's work, you must stop being my friend, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN *(tenderly).* Yes, yes, my dear.

OLGA. Father taught us to get up at seven. Irina wakes up at seven now and lies in bed thinking about something until at least nine. With such a serious expression on her face! *(Laughs.)*

IRINA. You're used to seeing me as a little girl and you think it strange when I have a serious expression on my face. But I'm twenty years old.

TUSENBACH. That longing to work. How well I understand it! I've never done a stroke of work in my life. I was born in cold, idle St Petersburg, in a family which never knew what work or worry was. I remember coming home from military school and kicking out at the footman who was trying to take off my boots. My mother would watch me admiringly. She couldn't understand when other people took a different view of the matter. I was protected from work. But only just! Only just! The time is coming when something huge will overwhelm us. A strong, healthy

storm is on its way. It is already quite close and soon it will sweep away the idleness and complacency in our society, the prejudice against work and the stagnant boredom. I shall work, and in another twenty-five or thirty years everyone will work. Everyone.

CHEBUTYKIN. I won't.

TUSENBACH. You don't count.

SOLYONY. In twenty-five years' time you will be no more, thank goodness. Two or three years from now you will die of a stroke or I'll lose my temper and put a bullet through your skull, my angel. *(Takes a bottle of perfume from his pocket and sprinkles it over his chest and hands.)*

CHEBUTYKIN *(laughs).* I've never done anything, you know. It's true. I haven't raised a finger ever since I left university. Haven't read a single book, only newspapers. *(Takes another newspaper out of his pocket.)* Here you are. I know from the papers that there was someone called Dobrolyubov, say, but I haven't the faintest idea what he wrote. *(Sound of banging on the floor downstairs.)* Ah. That's for me. I have a visitor. Just coming ... wait a minute... *(Hurries off combing his beard.)*

IRINA. He's up to something.

TUSENBACH. Yes. He went off with a very self-important look on his face. He's obviously about to bring you a present.

IRINA. Oh dear. What a nuisance.

OLGA. Yes, it's awful. He's always doing something silly.

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold... And on that oak a chain of gold... *(Gets up and sings quietly.)*

OLGA. You're not very cheerful today, Masha.

Masha goes on singing and puts on her hat

OLGA. Where are you going?

MASHA. Home.

IRINA. That's strange.

TUSENBACH. Leaving before the party!

MASHA. Never mind. I'll come back in the evening. Good-bye, my sweet. *(Kisses Irina.)* Here's wishing you health and happiness again. In the old days, when Father was still alive, we used to have thirty or forty officers at our birthday parties and it was very gay. But today there's hardly a soul and it's as quiet as a desert. I'll be going. I'm a bit down in the dumps today, rather miserable, but don't you take any notice of me. *(Laughing through tears.)* We'll have a talk later. Good-bye for now, my dear. I'm going for a walk somewhere.

IRINA *(upset).* Why do you have to...

OLGA *(tearfully).* I understand you, Masha.

SOLYONY. When a man philosophises, you get philosophistics or sophistics. But when it's a woman, or two women, you get—hey, diddle dee dee!

MASHA. What do you mean by that, you awfully terrible man.

SOLYONY. Nothing. He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death! *(Pause.)*

MASHA *(angrily, to Olga).* Don't cry!

Enter Anfissa and Ferapont with a cake

ANFISSA. This way, Grandad. Come on in. Your shoes aren't muddy. *(To Irina.)* It's from the Town Council, a cake from Mr Protopopov.

IRINA. Thank you. Tell him I'm very grateful. *(Takes the cake.)*

FERAPONT. Eh?

IRINA *(more loudly).* Tell him I'm very grateful.

OLGA. Give him a piece of pie, Nanny. Go with her, Ferapont, and she'll give you a piece of pie.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANFISSA. Come along, Grandad. Come along... *(Goes out with Ferapont.)*

MASHA. I don't like that Protopopov. Mikhail Potapich or Ivanich, whatever his name is, he shouldn't have been invited.

IRINA. I haven't invited him.

MASHA. Good for you.

Chebutykin comes in, followed by a soldier with a silver samovar. Sounds of surprise and displeasure

OLGA (covers her face with her hands). A samovar! How awful! *(Goes into the hall up to the table.)*

IRINA. What were you thinking of, my dear, old Doctor!

TUSENBACH *(laughing).* I told you so.

MASHA. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. My darling girls. You are all I have. You're all that I hold most dear in this world. I shall soon be sixty. I'm an old man, a lonely, useless old man. There's nothing good about me, except my love for you. But for you I would have been dead and gone years ago. *(To Irina.)* I've known you ever since you were born, dear child. I used to carry you in my arms. I loved your mother.

IRINA. But why such expensive presents?

CHEBUTYKIN *(through tears, crossly).* Expensive presents! Don't talk nonsense! *(To his orderly.)* Take the samovar through there. *(In a mocking voice.)* Expensive presents. *(The orderly takes the samovar into the hall.)*

ANFISSA *(walking across the drawing-room).* There's a stranger to see you, my dears. A Colonel somebody. He's taken his coat off already and he's a-comin' this way. Be a nice, polite, little girl, Irina, my love. *(Going out.)* It's long past lunch time, and all. Oh, my goodness!

TUSENBACH. That must be Vershinin.

Enter Vershinin

TUSENBACH. Colonel Vershinin.

VERSHININ *(to Masha and Irina.)* Allow me to introduce myself. Colonel Vershinin. It's so nice to see you at last. Well, I never! How grown-up you've become.

IRINA. Do sit down. We're very pleased to see you, too.

VERSHININ *(gaily).* How nice it is to be here. But there were three of you. I remember—three little girls. I can't recall your faces, but I remember perfectly well that your father, Colonel Prozorov, had three little girls. I saw them with my own eyes. How time flies! Oh, how time flies!

TUSENBACH. Colonel Vershinin has just arrived from Moscow.

IRINA. From Moscow? You are from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. Your father was a battery commander there, and I was an officer in the same brigade. *(To Masha.)* I seem to remember your face slightly.

MASHA. I don't remember you at all.

IRINA. Olga! Olga! *(Shouts into the hall.)* Come here, Olga!

Olga comes into the drawing-room from the hall

IRINA. Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

VERSHININ. You must be Olga, the eldest. And you're Masha. And you're Irina—the youngest.

OLGA. So you are from Moscow?

VERSHININ. Yes. I did my training in Moscow, then served there for quite a long time, until I was finally given this battery and came out here, as you can see. I don't remember you personally. I just remember that there were three sisters. I haven't forgotten what your father looked like though. If I close my eyes, I can picture him very vividly. I used to visit you in Moscow.

OLGA. I thought I could remember everyone, but...

IRINA. So you are from Moscow, Colonel Vershinin. What a surprise!

OLGA. We're moving back there, you see.

IRINA. We expect to be there by autumn. It's our home town. We were born there. In Old Bassmannaya Street. *(They both laugh happily.)*

MASHA. Fancy meeting someone from back home so unexpectedly. *(Animatedly.)* Now I've got it! Remember how they used to talk about the lovesick Major, Olga? You were a lieutenant then and you were in love with someone. For some reason everyone teased you by calling you 'Major'.

VERSHININ *(laughs).* That's right. The lovesick Major. You're quite right.

MASHA. You only had a moustache then. How you've aged! *(Through tears.)* Oh, how you've aged!

VERSHININ. Yes, I was still young and in love when they called me the lovesick Major. Things are different now.

OLGA. But you haven't a single grey hair. You may have got older, but you're not an old man yet.

VERSHININ. I'm getting on for forty-three, all the same. Have you been away from Moscow long?

IRINA. Eleven years. Why are you crying, Masha, you funny girl. *(Through tears.)* You're making me cry, too.

MASHA. I'm all right. Where did you live?

VERSHININ. In Old Bassmannaya Street.

OLGA. So did we.

VERSHININ. At one time I lived in German Street. I used to walk from there to the Red Barracks. There was a gloomy bridge on the way. You could hear the sound of the water under it, and that made you feel very sad if you were alone. *(Pause.)* But here you have a fine, broad river. A splendid river.

OLGA. Yes, but it's very cold here. Cold and lots of mosquitoes.

VERSHININ. Oh, come now! You've got such a good, healthy Russian climate here. Forest, river ... and birch

trees. Those sweet, simple birches. I love them more than any other tree. It's a good place to live. But it's strange that the railway station should be fifteen miles away. And nobody knows why.

SOLYONY. I know why. *(Everyone looks at him.)* Because if the railway were near, it wouldn't be far away, and if it's far away, that means it's not near.

An embarrassed silence

TUSENBACH. Our friend here is a real wag.

OLGA. Now I remember you, too.

VERSHININ. I used to know your mother.

CHEBUTYKIN. She was a lovely woman, God rest her soul.

IRINA. Mother was buried in Moscow.

OLGA. In the Novodevichy Cemetery.

MASHA. And, would you believe it, I'm beginning to forget her face. In the same way people won't be able to remember us. They'll forget, too.

VERSHININ. Yes, they'll forget. Such is fate, and there's nothing we can do about it. One day everything we think serious and important will be forgotten, or seem quite trivial. *(Pause.)* The funny thing is that we have no way of knowing what people will consider fine and important and what will seem pathetic and ridiculous. After all, the discoveries made by Copernicus, say, or Columbus, seemed pointless and silly at the time, didn't they? While some empty nonsense written by a crackpot was accepted as a great truth. The time may come when our present life, to which we are reconciled, will seem very strange, awkward, stupid, and not particularly moral, perhaps even sinful.

TUSENBACH. Who knows? Perhaps people will consider our life to be uplifting and speak of it with respect. There are no more executions, invasions or torturing, but all the same there is so much suffering.

SOLYONY *(in a thin voice).* Cluck, cluck, cluck... There's nothing the Baron enjoys so much as philosophising.

TUSENBACH. Will you please leave me alone, Solyony. *(Moves to another seat.)* This is getting tiresome.

SOLYONY *(in a thin voice).* Cluck, cluck, cluck...

TUSENBACH *(to Vershinin).* All the same the suffering that can be seen today—and there is much of it—suggests that a certain moral uplift has already been achieved by our society.

VERSHININ. Yes, yes, of course.

CHEBUTYKIN. You just said that people would consider our life uplifting, but people themselves are so earthbound. *(Gets up.)* Just look how short I am! You have to say my life is uplifting to console me for my lack of height, that's obvious.

Sound of a violin being played off-stage

MASHA. That's Andrei, our brother, playing.

IRINA. He's terribly clever. He'll probably be a professor one day. Father was a military man, but his son has chosen an academic career.

MASHA. Because Father wished it.

OLGA. We teased him a lot today. He seems to be a little in love.

IRINA. With one of the local young ladies. She'll probably come today.

MASHA. Oh, the way she dresses! You couldn't exactly say that her clothes are unattractive or out of fashion, but you just feel sorry for her. She'll put on a ghastly fringed yellow skirt with a bright red blouse. And her cheeks are all scrubbed and shining. Andrei isn't in love with her. I'm sure he isn't. He's got some taste, after all. He's just teasing us, just playing the fool. Yesterday I heard that she was getting married to Protopopov, the

chairman of the Local Council. That's fine. *(Through the side door.)* Andrei, come here! Just for a minute, dear.

Enter Andrei

OLGA. This is my brother Andrei.

VERSHININ. Alexander Vershinin.

ANDREI. Andrei Prozorov. *(Wipes his perspiring face.)* You are the new battery commander, I suppose.

OLGA. Just think, Andrei. Colonel Vershinin is from Moscow.

ANDREI. Really. That's too bad. My sisters won't give you a moment of peace now.

VERSHININ. I'm afraid they're already tired of me.

IRINA. Look what a pretty picture frame Andrei has given me. *(Shows him the frame.)* He made it himself.

VERSHININ *(looking at the frame and not knowing what to say).* Yes ... very nice.

IRINA. And you see that frame over there, above the piano. He made that too.

Andrei waves his hand and walks away

OLGA. He's so clever, and he plays the violin, and does fretwork. In fact, he's good at lots of things. Don't run away, Andrei. He has this habit of always running away. Come here!

Masha and Irina take him by the arms and laughingly lead him back

MASHA. Come on! Come on!

ANDREI. Do leave me alone, please!

MASHA. How funny you are. Colonel Vershinin used to be called the lovesick Major, but it never made him angry.

VERSHININ. Not in the slightest.

MASHA. I want to call you the lovesick violinist.

IRINA. Or the lovesick professor!

OLGA. He's in love! Our Andy's in love!

IRINA *(clapping).* Bravo! Bravo! Encore! Andy's in love!

CHEBUTYKIN *(comes up to Andrei from behind and puts both arms round his waist).* T'is for love alone that nature doth create us! *(Laughs loudly, keeping hold of the newspaper all the time.)*

ANDREI. That's enough! That's enough! *(Wipes his face.)* I didn't sleep a wink last night and I'm not quite myself, as they say. Read till four, then went to bed, but it was no good. I kept thinking about this and that, then all of a sudden it was dawn and the sun was creeping into my bedroom. There's an English book I'd like to translate this summer, while I'm still here.

VERSHININ. Do you know English, then?

ANDREI. Yes, I do. Father, God rest his soul, plagued us with education. It's silly and absurd, but I have to confess that I began to put on weight after his death and I've got quite fat in the past year as if my body had shaken off that plague. Thanks to Father, my sisters and I know French, German and English, and Irina knows Italian as well. But what it cost us!

MASHA. Knowing three languages in this town is a useless luxury. Not even a luxury. It's a useless appendage, like a sixth finger. We know a lot of unnecessary things.

VERSHININ. Oh, how can you say that! *(Laughs.)* You know a lot of unnecessary things! I don't believe any town can be so boring and wretched that it doesn't need intelligent, educated people. Say that out of the hundred thousand inhabitants in this town, which is a provincial backwater, of course, there are only three people like you. Obviously you can't expect to triumph over the mass of ignorant people around you. You will gradually have to give way and become absorbed by the one hundred thousand. Life will stifle you. But you won't disappear

altogether, nor will you cease to exert an influence. After you another six people like you will appear, say, then twelve and so on, until the people like you are the majority. In two or three hundred years life on earth will be more splendid and marvellous than we can imagine. Man has need of such a life and if it does not exist as yet he should try to foresee it, wait for it, dream about it and prepare for it. To do this he must see and know more than his father and grandfather did. *(Laughs.)* And you are complaining that you know a lot of unnecessary things.

MASHA *(takes off her hat).* I'm staying for lunch.

IRINA *(sighing).* We should have written all that down, really...

In the meantime Andrei has slipped out unnoticed

TUSENBACH. You say that life on earth will be splendid and marvellous many years from now. That is true. But in order to take part in it now, even at a distance, we must prepare for it, we must work...

VERSHININ *(stands up).* Quite so. What a lot of flowers there are here! *(Looking round.)* And what a wonderful place this is. How I envy you! All my life I've lived in lodgings with two chairs, a sofa and stoves that fill the room with smoke. What I've always missed in life is flowers like these. *(Rubs his hands.)* Ah, well!

TUSENBACH. Yes, we must work. You are probably thinking that the German in me has gone all sentimental. But I'm Russian, honestly I am. I don't even speak German. My father is Orthodox. *(Pause.)*

VERSHININ *(pacing up and down).* I often wonder what would happen if we could start our lives again, knowing what we know now. If the first life, which has already been lived, were just the rough draft and the second one the fair copy. I think that each of us would try most of all not to repeat his mistakes. Or at least he would create different circumstances for his life, get himself a

place like this with masses of flowers and sunlight. I have a wife and two little girls, my wife's a sick woman, and so on and so forth. If I could start my life again I would never get married. No, certainly not.

Enter Kulygin in a schoolmaster's frock-coat

KULYGIN *(goes up to Irina).* Allow me, dear sister, to congratulate you on your birthday and to wish you sincerely, with all my heart, good health and everything that one can wish a young lady of your age. And then to make you a present of this little book. *(Hands her a book.)* The history of our school over the last fifty years, written by myself. It's a simple little book, written for want of anything better to do, but you be sure to read it all the same. Good morning, everyone! *(To Vershinin.)* Fyodor Kulygin, teacher at the local grammar school. *(To Irina.)* This book contains a list of all the pupils who have graduated from our school over the last fifty years. *Feci, quod potui, faciant meliora potentes*. (Kisses Masha.)*

IRINA. But you gave me the same book at Easter.

KULYGIN *(laughs).* Surely not! In that case give it back to me or, better still, let the Colonel have it. Here, Colonel. Read it when you've got a spare moment.

VERSHININ. Thank you. *(Prepares to leave.)* Delighted to have met you...

OLGA. You're not going? Oh, you mustn't!

IRINA. Do stay and have lunch with us.

OLGA. Please do!

VERSHININ *(bows).* I see this is a birthday party. Do excuse me. I didn't know. I haven't even congratulated you. *(Goes into the hall with Olga.)*

KULYGIN. Today is Sunday, ladies and gentlemen, the day of rest. So let us rest and enjoy ourselves each in accordance with his age and station. We must remember to

* I have done my best, let he who can do better.

roll up the carpets and store them away until winter. They should be sprinkled with insect-powder or naphthalene. The Romans were healthy because they knew how to labour and how to rest from their labours. They had *mens sana in corpore sano.* Their life followed a set form. Our headmaster always says that the most important thing in any life is its form. Anything that loses its form will perish—the same goes for our everyday life. *(Puts his arm round Masha's waist, laughing.)* Masha loves me. My wife loves me. And you must put the curtains away, too. I'm in excellent spirits today. Masha, we're due at the headmaster's at four this afternoon. An outing is being arranged for the staff and their families.

MASHA. I'm not going.

KULYGIN *(pained).* Why not, Masha, my dear.

MASHA. We'll talk about that later. *(Angrily.)* Oh, alright, I'll go. Only do leave me alone, please. *(Walks away.)*

KULYGIN. And afterwards we'll spend the evening at the headmaster's. There's a man who, in spite of his poor health, does his utmost to be sociable. A man of irreproachable character. A most excellent man. After the meeting yesterday he said to me: "I'm tired, Kulygin, tired!" *(Looks at the clock on the wall, then at his watch.)* Yes, "I'm tired," he said.

Sound of a violin off-stage

OLGA. Lunch is ready, ladies and gentlemen. Take your seats, please. We have a cake.

KULYGIN. Ah, my dear Olga! Yesterday I worked from early morning until eleven o'clock at night. I was so tired. And today I feel happy. *(Goes into the hall and up to the table.)* My dear Olga...

CHEBUTYKIN *(puts the newspaper into his pocket and combs his beard).* A cake! That's splendid.

MASHA *(sternly, to Chebutykin).* Make sure you don't

drink anything today. Do you hear me? Drinking's bad for you.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, why bring that up? I've got over that now. It's two years since I went to the bottle. *(Impatiently.)* And what does it matter in any case?

MASHA. Don't you dare drink anything, all the same. *(Angrily, but trying not to be overheard by her husband.)* Another boring evening at the headmaster's, damn it!

TUSENBACH. If I were you, I wouldn't go. It's very simple.

CHEBUTYKIN. Don't go, my love.

MASHA. Don't go, indeed. What a wretched, intolerable life this is. *(Goes into the hall.)*

CHEBUTYKIN *(follows her).* Come now!

SOLYONY *(walking over to the hall).* Cluck, cluck, cluck...

TUSENBACH. That's enough, Solyony. Stop it.

SOLYONY. Cluck, cluck, cluck...

KULYGIN *(cheerfully).* Your good health, Colonel! I'm a teacher and one of the family here, Masha's husband. She's a good person, Masha. A very good person.

VERSHININ. I'll have some of that dark vodka, please. *(Drinks.)* Your good health! *(To Olga.)* It's so nice here.

Only Irina and Tusenbach remain in the drawing-room

IRINA. Masha is in a bad mood today. She got married at eighteen when she thought he was the cleverest person in the world. It's different now. He's the kindest, but not the cleverest.

OLGA *(impatiently).* Andrei, do come along!

ANDREI *(off-stage).* Just coming. *(Comes in and goes up to the table.)*

TUSENBACH. What are you thinking?

IRINA. Nothing in particular. I don't like that Solyony of yours. He frightens me. Talks nothing but nonsense...

TUSENBACH. He's a strange fellow. I alternate between feeling sorry for him and irritated by him, but mainly sorry. I think he's shy. When he and I are alone he can be very clever and affectionate, but in company he's bad-mannered and bullying. Don't go in yet. Let them get seated at the table. And let me spend a little longer with you. What are you thinking? *(Pause.)* You're twenty and I'm not thirty yet. Think of all the years we have ahead of us. A long, long string of days full of my love for you.

IRINA. Please don't talk to me of love.

TUSENBACH *(not listening).* I yearn so passionately to live, to strive, to work, and this yearning has become merged with my love for you, Irina. As luck would have it, you are beautiful, so life seems beautiful too! What are you thinking?

IRINA. You say life is beautiful. But what if it only appears to be. For the three of us, my sisters and I, life has not been beautiful yet. It has choked us like a lot of weeds. I've started to cry. I mustn't. *(Quickly wipes her face and smiles.)* We must work. It's because we've never worked that we're so miserable and take such a gloomy view of life. We are the children of people who despised work.

Natasha comes in; she is wearing a pink dress with a green belt

NATASHA. They're already sitting down to lunch. I'm late. *(Takes a quick look at herself in the mirror, pats her hair and smoothes her dress.)* My hair's not looking too bad. *(Catches sight of Irina.)* Happy birthday, Miss Irina. *(Gives her a long, smacking kiss.)* You've got so many guests. I feel quite out of it. Good day, Baron.

OLGA *(coming into the drawing room).* And here's Natasha. Hello, my dear! *(They kiss.)*

NATASHA. You've got such a lot of people here. I feel terribly shy.

OLGA. Don't be silly. They're all old friends. *(In a*

low, worried voice.) You're wearing a green belt! You mustn't do that, dear!

NATASHA. Why, is it unlucky?

OLGA. No. It just doesn't suit your dress. It looks funny.

NATASHA *(in a whining voice).* Does it really? But it's not green really, it's more like brown. *(Follows Olga into the hall.)*

Everyone sits down to lunch in the hall; the drawing-room is empty

KULYGIN. Here's wishing you a good husband, Irina. It's time you got married.

CHEBUTYKIN. And the same to you, Natasha!

KULYGIN. Natasha already has a young man.

MASHA *(strikes her plate with her fork).* Give us a glass of wine then, lads. This is the life! Here goes!

KULYGIN. Three minus for behaviour.

VERSHININ. This liqueur is delicious. What flavour is it?

SOLYONY. Cockroach flavour.

IRINA *(in a weepy voice).* Ugh! How revolting.

OLGA. There is roast turkey and apple pie for dinner. Thank goodness! I've got the whole day at home, and the evening as well. Everybody come back this evening.

VERSHININ. May I come too?

IRINA. Please do.

NATASHA. Everything's very informal here.

CHEBUTYKIN. T'is for love alone that nature doth create us! *(Laughs.)*

ANDREI *(angrily).* Stop it, everybody. Must you go on like that?

Enter Fedotik and Rodé with a large basket of flowers

FEDOTIK. They're having lunch already.

RODÉ *(loudly and gutterally).* Lunch already? So they are.

FEDOTIK. Just a minute! *(Takes a photograph.)* One! Wait a bit more! *(Takes another photograph.)* Two! Now I'm ready!

They pick up the basket and go into the hall, where they are given a noisy welcome

RODÉ *(loudly).* A happy birthday and all the very best. The weather's wonderful today, absolutely marvellous. All morning I was out walking with the schoolboys. I teach gym up at the grammar school.

FEDOTIK. You can move now, Miss Irina. *(Takes a photograph.)* You're looking very nice today. *(Takes a top out of his pocket.)* By the way, here's a top for you. It makes a lovely noise.

IRINA. What fun!

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold... And on that oak a chain of gold... *(Tearfully.)* Why do I keep saying that? I've had it on my mind all day.

KULYGIN. We're thirteen at table!

RODÉ *(loudly).* Surely no one here is superstitious, ladies and gentlemen? *(Laughter.)*

KULYGIN. Thirteen at table means that somebody here is in love. It wouldn't be you, Doctor, by any chance, would it? *(Laughter.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm an old sinner, but Miss Natasha seems to be embarrassed about something or other. Darned if I know what.

Loud laughter; Natasha runs out of the hall into the drawing-room, followed by Andrei

ANDREI. Don't take any notice of them. Wait! Stop, I beg you.

NATASHA. I'm so ashamed. I don't know what's the matter with me, and they keep laughing at me. Running out of the hall just now like that was bad manners, I know, but

I couldn't help it. I couldn't... *(Covers her face with her hands.)*

ANDREI. I beg you, I beseech you, don't be upset, my dear. They're only joking. They don't mean any harm. Really. They're all good, kind people who love me and you, my dearest, my sweetest. Come here to the window. They can't see us here. *(Looks round.)*

NATASHA. I'm not used to being in company.

ANDREI. Oh, youth! Wonderful, marvellous youth! My dearest, my sweetest, don't be so upset! Believe me, please! I feel so wonderful. My heart is full of love and ecstasy. No one can see us. No one. Why, when did I fall in love with you—I just don't know. My dear, lovely, innocent Natasha. Please be my wife! I love you, love you ... as I've never loved anyone before. *(A kiss.)*

Two officers come in and stop in amazement at the sight of the kissing couple

Curtain

ACT TWO

The scene is the same as in Act One.
It is eight o'clock in the evening. The faint sound of an accordion can be heard from the street. The house is in darkness. Enter Natasha in a dressing gown with a lighted candle. She stops at the door of Andrei's room

NATASHA. What are you doing, Andy dear? Reading? It's nothing, I just wondered. *(Walks on, opens another door, takes a look inside, then closes it again.)* Any lights left burning?..

ANDREI *(comes in carrying a book).* What's the matter, Natasha?

NATASHA. I'm just making sure no lights have been left burning. It's Shrovetide and the servants are in a fair

tizzy. Have to keep an eye on things, or goodness knows what might happen. Last night I went into the drawing room at twelve o'clock and found a lighted candle there. I still don't know who left it. *(Puts down her candle.)* What's the time?

ANDREI *(looking at his watch).* A quarter past eight.

NATASHA. And Olga and Irina aren't home yet. They still haven't got back. Working their fingers to the bone, poor things. Olga's at a staff meeting and Irina at the telegraph office. *(Sighs.)* Only this morning I said to your sister: "Irina," I said, "you must look after yourself, my love." But she won't listen to me. Quarter past eight, did you say? I'm afraid our Bobbikins is ill. Why is he so cold? Yesterday he had a temperature, but now he's as cold as ice. I'm so frightened.

ANDREI. Don't worry, Natasha. He's a healthy baby.

NATASHA. Still I'd better put him on a diet. I'm so frightened. They say the mummers are due here at nine o'clock. It would be better if they didn't come, Andy dear.

ANDREI. Well, I don't know. They have been invited.

NATASHA. This morning the little lad woke up and gave me a great big smile. He recognised me, you see! "Hello Bobbikins," I said, "Hello, my darling!" And he laughed! Children understand everything, you know. So I'll tell them not to let the mummers in, Andy, shall I?

ANDREI *(hesitantly).* Well, it's really up to my sisters. It's their house.

NATASHA. Yes, it's their house as well. I'll tell them. They're so kind. *(Starts walking off.)* I've ordered yoghurt for supper. The doctor says you must eat nothing but yoghurt if you want to lose weight. *(Stops.)* Bobbikins is so cold. I'm afraid that room is too draughty for him. We should find somewhere else for him, even if it's just till the warmer weather comes. Now Irina's room would be just right for the baby. It's dry and it gets the sun all day. We must tell her to share with Olga for the time being. She's

never at home in the daytime, anyway. She only sleeps here. *(Pause.)* Why don't you say something, Andy dear?

ANDREI. Oh, I was just thinking. Anyway, there's nothing I can say, is there?

NATASHA. Let me think ... there's something I had to tell you... Oh, yes. Ferapont has come from the Council. He's asking for you.

ANDREI *(yawning).* Send him up.

Natasha goes out. Andrei picks up the candle she has forgotten and reads his book. Enter Ferapont; he is wearing an old, tattered coat with the collar turned up and a scarf round his ears to keep them warm

ANDREI. Hello, old man. What is it, then?

FERAPONT. The chairman has sent you this book and some papers. Here you are, Master Andrei. *(Hands him a book and a packet.)*

ANDREI. Thank you. That's fine. But why have you come so late? It's after eight.

FERAPONT. Eh?

ANDREI *(more loudly).* I said, it's late, after eight o'clock.

FERAPONT. That's right. It were still light when I got here, but they wouldn't let me see you. Said you was busy. Well, if he's busy, he's busy, I thinks to myself. I ain't in any great hurry. *(Thinking that Andrei is asking him something.)* Eh?

ANDREI. Nothing. *(Looks at the book.)* Tomorrow's Friday. It's not one of my days, but I'll go down to the Council all the same ... and get on with some work. It's so dull at home. *(Pause.)* What strange turns life takes, old man, how it deceives us. Today, for want of anything better to do, out of sheer boredom, I happened to pick up this book—my old university lecture notes—and I thought how ridiculous it was. Here am I, secretary of the Local Council, the one that has Protopopov as chairman and me

as secretary, and the very most I can hope for is to be a member of the Council. For me to be a member of the Local Council, me who dreams each night that I am a professor at Moscow University, a famous scholar of whom all Russia is proud!

FERAPONT. I couldn't rightly say, Master Andrei. My hearing's not what it ought to be.

ANDREI. If you could hear properly I probably wouldn't be talking to you. I must talk to somebody. My wife doesn't understand me, and I'm afraid of my sisters, for some reason, afraid that they will laugh at me, or reproach me. I don't drink and I don't like taverns, but how I'd love to be in Moscow now sitting at Testov's or the Bolshoi Moscow restaurant, old man.

FERAPONT. The contractor at the Council were saying t'other day that some merchants got together and started eating pancakes in Moscow. One of them ate forty and popped off. Or was it fifty? I can't remember.

ANDREI. You sit in a large Moscow restaurant, you don't know anyone and no one knows you, but all the same you don't feel like a stranger. Yet here you know everyone and everyone knows you, but you are a stranger. A complete stranger, all on your own.

FERAPONT. Eh? *(Pause.)* And that contractor said—maybe he were lying—that there's a great cable running right across Moscow.

ANDREI. What for?

FERAPONT. I wouldn't know, Master. It were the contractor who said so.

ANDREI. Nonsense. *(Reads his book.)* Have you ever been to Moscow?

FERAPONT *(after a pause).* No, Master. The good Lord didn't will it. *(Pause.)* Can I go now?

ANDREI. Yes, you can. Good-bye, old fellow. *(Ferapont goes out.)* Good-bye, old fellow. *(Reading.)* Come here tomorrow and collect these papers. Off you go. *(Pause.)*

Oh, he's gone. *(A bell rings.)* Yes, there's work to be done. *(Stretches and goes leisurely into his room.)*

Off-stage the nanny is singing as she rocks the baby to sleep. Enter Masha and Vershinin. While they are talking the chambermaid lights the lamp and candles

MASHA. I don't know. *(Pause.)* Of course, it may be mainly a question of habit. After Father died, for instance, it took us a long time to get used to not having orderlies. But I think that fairness as well as habit prompts me to say this. Perhaps it is different in other places, but in our town the most decent, high-minded and educated people are the army men.

VERSHININ. I'm thirsty. I'd love some tea.

MASHA *(looking at her watch).* They'll be serving it soon. They married me off when I was eighteen. I was afraid of my husband because he was a schoolmaster and I had only just left school. I thought he was terribly learned, clever and important. It's different now, unfortunately.

VERSHININ. I see ... yes.

MASHA. I'm not talking about my husband. I've got used to him. But so many civilians are rude, discourteous and uneducated. I can't help being upset, insulted, by rudeness. It pains me to see that a person is insufficiently sensitive, obliging or courteous. I find it painful to be in the company of teachers, my husband's colleagues.

VERSHININ. Yes, but all the same I don't think there's much difference between civilians and army men, at least in this town. Listen to any educated person here, a civilian or an officer, and he'll tell you that he's fed up with his wife or his house or his estate or his horses. Why does a Russian, who is by nature a most high-minded person, aim so low in his own life? Tell me?

MASHA. Why?

VERSHININ. Why is he fed up with his children and his wife? And why are his wife and children fed up with him?

MASHA. You're not in a very good mood today.

VERSHININ. Perhaps I'm not. I haven't had any lunch today. Haven't eaten a thing since breakfast. My daughter's not very well. When my little girls are ill I get very alarmed and conscience-stricken that they have a mother like her. Oh, if you could have seen her today! How petty she is! We started quarrelling at seven o'clock, and at nine I slammed the door and walked out. *(Pause.)* I never talk about this to anyone. It's strange that I should be complaining about it to you. *(Kisses her hand.)* Don't be angry with me. I've nobody but you—nobody. *(Pause.)*

MASHA. Listen to the wind howling in the stove. It howled like that just before Father died. Exactly like that.

VERSHININ. Are you superstitious?

MASHA. Yes.

VERSHININ. That's strange. *(Kisses her hand.)* You're a magnificent, wonderful woman. Magnificent and wonderful. It's dark here, but I can see your eyes shining.

MASHA *(sits down on another chair).* There's more light here.

VERSHININ. I love you, I love you, I love you. I love your eyes, your movements. I dream about them. You magnificent, wonderful woman.

MASHA *(laughing softly).* When you talk to me like that, I can't help laughing, although I go cold with fright. Don't say it again, I beg you. *(In an undertone.)* Oh, do, then. I don't mind. *(Covers her face with her hands.)* I don't care. There's someone coming. Talk about something else.

Enter Irina and Tusenbach through the hall

TUSENBACH. I've got a triple-barrelled name. I'm actually Baron Tusenbach-Krone-Altschauer. But I'm Russian and Orthodox like you. There's hardly anything German about me, unless it's my patience and the

persistence with which I am boring you. I escort you home every evening.

IRINA. I'm so tired!

TUSENBACH. And I shall come to the telegraph office and see you home each day. For ten years or twenty years, until you send me away. *(Noticing Masha and Vershinin, delightedly.)* Oh, it's you! Hello!

IRINA. Home at last! *(To Masha.)* A woman came in just now to send a telegram to her brother in Saratov saying that her son had died this morning, but she couldn't remember his address. She sent it off like that without an address, just Saratov. She was crying. I was rude to her for no reason at all. I told her I hadn't got all day. It was so stupid. Are the mummers coming tonight?

MASHA. Yes.

IRINA *(sitting down in an armchair).* Must have a rest. I'm so tired!

TUSENBACH *(with a smile).* When you come home after work you look so young and wretched. *(Pause.)*

IRINA. I'm so tired. I don't like the telegraph office. I really don't.

MASHA. You've got thinner. *(Whistles.)* And younger looking. Your face looks very boyish.

TUSENBACH. That's the haircut.

IRINA. I must find another job. This one doesn't suit me. It just hasn't got the things I wanted so badly, the things I dreamed of... It's work without poetry, without thought... *(A knock on the floor.)* That's the doctor. *(To Tusenbach.)* Knock back, will you, dear. I can't ... I'm so tired.

Tusenbach knocks on the floor

IRINA. He'll be here in a minute. Something must be done. The doctor and Andrei were at the club yesterday and they lost again. Apparently Andrei lost two hundred roubles.

MASHA *(indifferently).* What can we do about it now?

IRINA. He lost two weeks ago and in December. I wish he'd lose everything, then perhaps we could get out of this town. Oh, dear. I dream about Moscow every night. It's as if I were quite crazy. *(Laughs.)* We're going there in June, but there's February, March, April, May—almost half a year to go before then.

MASHA. Natasha mustn't find out about his losses.

IRINA. I don't think she could care less.

Chebutykin who has just got up—he has been having a nap after lunch—comes into the hall and combs his beard, then sits down at the table and takes out a newspaper

MASHA. Here he is. Has he paid the rent?

IRINA *(laughs).* No. Hasn't paid a penny for eight months. He must have forgotten.

MASHA *(laughs).* How grandly he's sitting there.

They all laugh; pause

IRINA. Why are you so quiet, Colonel?

VERSHININ. I don't know. I'm dying for some tea. My kingdom for a cup of tea! I haven't eaten anything since breakfast.

CHEBUTYKIN. Miss Irina.

IRINA. Yes?

CHEBUTYKIN. Come here, please. Venez ici. *(Irina goes and sits at the table.)* I like having you next to me. *(Irina lays out a game of patience.)*

VERSHININ. Well, then. If we can't have tea, let's at least do have a little philosophising.

TUSENBACH. I'm game. What's the subject?

VERSHININ. The subject? Let's imagine what life will be like in, say, two or three hundred years' time.

TUSENBACH. Why? People will fly in balloons, there will be a new fashion in men's jackets, and they may discover a sixth sense, but life will remain the same—hard,

full of mysteries, and happy. In a thousand years' time people will still sigh and say, "Oh, how hard life is!" Yet they will be just as afraid of death and just as reluctant to die as they are now.

VERSHININ *(after a moment's thought).* I'm not so sure. I think that everything on earth will gradually change. That it is already changing before our eyes. In two hundred, three hundred or perhaps a thousand years—the amount of time is not important—a new and happy life will begin. We won't take part in it, of course, but we are living for it now, working and, well, suffering for it. We are creating it. Therein lies the aim of our existence and, if you like, our happiness.

Masha laughs softly

TUSENBACH. Why are you laughing?

MASHA. I don't know. I've been laughing all day.

VERSHININ. I finished my education at the same point as you. I didn't go on to the academy. I read a great deal, but I don't know how to select books and perhaps I don't read what I ought. Yet the longer I live, the more I want to know. My hair is turning grey and I shall soon be an old man, but I know so little—so little. All the same I am quite convinced of the main thing, the most important thing. If only I could show you that there is no such thing as happiness for us, and that there cannot and will not be. All we must do is work, work. Happiness is for our distant descendants. *(Pause.)* If not for me, then at least for the descendants of my descendants.

Fedotik and Rodé appear in the hall. They sit down and begin to sing quietly, playing a guitar

TUSENBACH. So you think we should not even dream of happiness. But what if I am happy?

VERSHININ. You're not.

TUSENBACH *(flinging up his arms and laughing).* We obviously don't understand each other. How am I to convince you?

Masha laughs softly

(Wiggling his finger.) There, laugh at that! *(To Vershinin.)* Not only two or three hundred years from now, but a million years from now life will still be the same as it always has been. It does not change. It remains constant, following its own laws which are no concern of ours or, at least, which we will never know. Migrant birds, cranes, for example, fly on and on and whatever thoughts, great or small, may be passing through their heads, they will still go on flying, without knowing where or why. They will go on flying however many philosophers may appear among them. Let them philosophise as much as they like, as long as they go on flying.

MASHA. But surely there must be a meaning?

TUSENBACH. A meaning... Look, it's snowing. What meaning is there in that? *(Pause.)*

MASHA. I think a person must believe in something, or must search for a faith, otherwise his life is empty, quite empty. To live and not to know why cranes fly, why children are born, why there are stars in the sky... You must know what you are living for, otherwise everything is nonsense, nothing matters. *(Pause.)*

VERSHININ. All the same it's a pity not to be young any more.

MASHA. As Gogol says: "It's a boring life, my friends!"

TUSENBACH. And as I say, you're difficult to argue with, my friends! Bother you!

CHEBUTYKIN *(reading the newspaper).* Balzac was married in Berdichev.

Irina sings softly

I'll make a note of that. *(Writes in his notebook.)* Balzac was married in Berdichev. *(Goes on reading the paper.)*

IRINA *(laying out a game of patience, reflectively).* Balzac was married in Berdichev.

TUSENBACH. The die is cast. *(To Masha.)* Did you know that I have sent in my resignation?

MASHA. Yes. I had heard. I don't see anything good about that. I don't like civilians.

TUSENBACH. It makes no difference. *(Gets up.)* What sort of an army man am I? I'm not handsome. But what does it matter? I'm going to work. To work for at least one day in my life so hard that I come home in the evening, collapse on the bed and go to sleep straightaway. *(Going into the hall.)* Labourers must sleep very soundly.

FEDOTIK *(to Irina).* I've just bought these coloured crayons for you at Pyzhikov's in Moscow Street. And this penknife.

IRINA. You're used to treating me as a child, but I'm grown up now. *(Takes the crayons and penknife.)* Aren't they nice!

FEDOTIK. I bought a penknife for myself as well. Look. Here's one blade, and another, and a third, that one's to clean your ears, and this is to clean your finger-nails.

RODÉ. How old are you, Doctor?

CHEBUTYKIN. Me? Thirty-two! *(Laughter.)*

FEDOTIK. I'll show you another way of playing patience. *(Lays out the cards.)*

The samovar is brought in; Anfissa bustles round it; a little later Natasha comes in and also busies herself around the table. Enter Solyony, who greets everyone and then sits down at the table

VERSHININ. Just listen to that wind!

MASHA. Yes. I'm sick of the winter. I've already forgotten what summer is like.

IRINA. This patience is coming out, I can see. We'll be going to Moscow.

FEDOTIK. No, it isn't. Look, you've put the eight on the two of spades. *(Laughs.)* That means you won't be going to Moscow.

CHEBUTYKIN *(reading the newspaper).* Small-pox epidemic in Tsitsihar.

ANFISSA *(coming up to Masha).* Have some tea, Masha, my love. *(To Vershinin.)* And you too, sir. Begging yer pardon, but I've forgotten your name.

MASHA. Bring it here, Nanny. I won't come over there.

IRINA. Nanny!

ANFISSA. Coming.

NATASHA *(to Solyony).* Babies do understand, you know. "Hello, Bobbikins," I said. "Hello, my little love!" And he gave me such a special look. You think I'm only saying that because I'm his mother, don't you? But it's not true. He's a very unusual child.

SOLYONY. If he were my child, I would fry him in a frying pan and then gobble him all up. *(Takes his glass into the drawing-room and sits down in a corner.)*

NATASHA *(covering her face with her hands).* What a bad-mannered man!

MASHA. Happy is the person who doesn't notice whether it is summer or winter. I wouldn't care about the weather if I were in Moscow.

VERSHININ. I've just read a diary written by a French minister while he was in prison. The minister was sentenced for the Panama business. He was so ecstatic about the birds which he could see through the window of his cell and had never noticed before when he was a minister. Now that he's been released he doesn't notice them any more, of course. And you won't notice Moscow when you are actually living there. There is no happiness for us and never can be. We only go on wanting it.

TUSENBACH *(picks up a box from the table).* Where are the sweets?

IRINA. Solyony ate them.

TUSENBACH. All of them?

ANFISSA *(bringing the tea).* A letter for you, sir.

VERSHININ. For me? *(Takes the letter.)* It's from my daughter. *(Reads.)* Yes, of course... *(To Masha.)* Please excuse me, if I slip out. I won't have any tea, thank you. *(Stands up, agitatedly.)* It's always the same old thing.

MASHA. What's the matter? If you don't mind my asking.

VERSHININ *(quietly).* My wife has tried to poison herself again. I must go. I'll slip out without saying good-bye. All this is most unpleasant. *(Kisses Masha's hand.)* My dear. You fine, wonderful woman. I'll slip out this way. *(Goes out.)*

ANFISSA. Where's he gone? I've just brought his tea. There's a fine one for you!

MASHA *(angrily).* Be quiet! Stop pestering. You never leave anyone alone. *(Takes her cup to the table.)* I'm fed up with you, old woman.

ANFISSA. What's made you so angry, love?

ANDREI'S VOICE: Anfissa!

ANFISSA *(imitating him).* Anfissa! Sitting there in his room... *(Goes off.)*

MASHA *(by the table in the hall, angrily).* Move over so I can sit down. *(Mixes up the cards.)* Cards spread all over the place. Drink up your tea.

IRINA. You're in a temper, Masha.

MASHA. If I'm in a temper, don't talk to me. Leave me alone.

CHEBUTYKIN *(laughing).* Leave her alone, leave her alone...

MASHA. You are sixty years old, yet you're always talking a load of damn rubbish, just like a little boy.

NATASHA *(sighs).* My dear Masha, why must you use

such language? With your attractive looks, I tell you quite frankly, you would be a great success in high society, if it weren't for the language you use. *Je vous prie, pardonnez moi, Marie, mais vous avez des manières un peu grossières.**

TUSENBACH *(trying not to laugh).* Pass me ... pass me ... I think that's brandy...

NATASHA. *Il parait que mon Bobbikins déjà ne dort pas.*** He's woken up. He's not well today. I must go and see him. Excuse me. *(Goes off.)*

IRINA. Where has Colonel Vershinin gone?

MASHA. Home. There's something the matter with his wife again.

TUSENBACH *(goes up to Solyony carrying a decanter of brandy).* You're forever sitting on your own thinking about something—goodness knows what Come on, let's make it up. Let's have a drink of brandy. *(They drink.)* I shall have to play the piano all night, probably lots of sentimental rubbish. Never mind!

SOLYONY. Why make it up? We haven't quarrelled.

TUSENBACH. You always make me feel as if something has happened between us. You are a strange person, you must admit.

SOLYONY *(reciting).* I am strange, yet who is not? Do not be angry, Aleko.

TUSENBACH. What's Aleko got to do with it? *(Pause.)*

SOLYONY. When I'm alone with someone, it's all right. I'm like everyone else. But in company I get shy, depressed, and talk all sorts of nonsense. Yet I'm more honest and upright than very many other people. I can prove it.

TUSENBACH. I often get angry with you. You are

* Pardon me, Marie, but you're rather bad-mannered.

** It looks as if my Bobbikins is not asleep any more.

always picking quarrels with me in company. But for some reason I like you all the same. Come what may, I'm getting drunk today. Cheers!

SOLYONY. Cheers! *(They drink.)* I've never had anything against you, Baron. It's just that I'm like Lermontov. *(Quietly.)* I even look a little like him ... people say. *(Takes a bottle of perfume from his pocket and pours it over his hands.)*

TUSENBACH. I'm resigning. Basta! I've been thinking about it for five years and at last I've made up my mind. I'm going to work.

SOLYONY *(reciting).* Do not be angry, Aleko. Forget, forget your dreams.

While they are talking Andrei comes in with a book quietly and sits down by a candle

TUSENBACH. I'm going to work.

CHEBUTYKIN *(coming into the drawing-room with Irina).* And it was real Caucasian food: onion soup, followed by *chehartma* for the meat course.

SOLYONY. *Cheremsha* isn't meat at all. It's a vegetable like an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. No, my dear fellow. *Chehartma* isn't an onion, it's roast lamb.

SOLYONY. I tell you that *cheremsha* is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. And I tell you that *chehartma* is lamb.

SOLYONY. And I tell you that *cheremsha* is an onion.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the point in arguing with you. You've never been to the Caucasus and never eaten *chehartma.*

SOLYONY. I've never eaten it, because I can't stand it. It smells like garlic.

ANDREI *(imploringly).* That's enough, gentlemen. I beg you.

TUSENBACH. When are the mummers coming?

IRINA. They said at nine. That means they'll be here any minute.

TUSENBACH *(embraces Andrei).* Oh, my cottage, my new cottage...

ANDREI *(dances and sings).* My new cottage made of maple...

CHEBUTYKIN *(dances).* With a little trellis too! *(Laughter.)*

TUSENBACH *(kisses Andrei).* Damn it, let's have a drink. Let's have our first proper drink together, Andrei. I'm coming with you, Andrei, to Moscow, to the university.

SOLYONY. Which one? There are two universities in Moscow.

ANDREI. There's only one university in Moscow.

SOLYONY. And I say there are two.

ANDREI. Make it three, if you like. The more the better.

SOLYONY. There are two universities in Moscow! *(Murmurs of protest and disagreement.)* Two universities, the old one and the new one. But if you don't like listening to me, if my words irritate you, I'll keep quiet. I can even go into another room. *(Goes out through one of the doors.)*

TUSENBACH. Bravo! Bravo! *(Laughs.)* You may begin, ladies and gentlemen. I'm going to play now! That Solyony is a funny fellow. *(Sits down at the piano and starts playing a waltz.)*

MASHA *(waltzing by herself).* The baron is drunk, tra la, tra la, the baron is drunk, tra la, tra la.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA *(to Chebutykin).* Doctor! *(Says something to Chebutykin, then goes out quietly. Chebutykin taps Tusenbach on the shoulder and whispers something to him.)*

IRINA. What's the matter?

CHEBUTYKIN. It's time we were going. Good-bye all.

TUSENBACH. Good-night. It's time we were off.

IRINA. What do you mean? What about the mummers?

ANDREI *(embarrassed).* They're not coming. You see, dear, Natasha says that Bobbikins isn't feeling well and so... Oh, I don't know. I couldn't care less.

IRINA *(shrugging her shoulders).* Bobbikins isn't feeling well!

MASHA. Well, I'll be damned! So we're being thrown out. *(To Irina.)* She's the one who's ill, not Bobbikins. Up here! *(Taps her forehead.)* The stupid, selfish creature.

Andrei goes out through the door right to his room, followed by Chebutykin; the rest say good-bye to one another

FEDOTIK. What a shame! I'd counted on spending the evening here, but if the baby's ill ... of course ... I'll bring him a toy tomorrow.

RODÉ *(loudly).* I had a nap after lunch today, specially. Thought I'd be up dancing all night. It's only nine o'clock!

MASHA. Let's go outside and talk. We'll decide what to do there.

Someone says "Good-bye! All the best!" Tusenbach laughs. They all go out. Anfissa and the maid clear the table and put out the lights. Anfissa sings to herself. Andrei enters in his coat and hat with Chebutykin

CHEBUTYKIN. I never married, because life flashed past like lightning and because I was madly in love with your mother, who was married already.

ANDREI. No one should get married. It's boring.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe, but what about being lonely. Say what you like but loneliness is a terrible thing, my friend. Although, when all's said and done ... it makes no difference one way or the other.

ANDREI. Let's go quickly.

CHEBUTYKIN. What's the hurry? We've plenty of time.

ANDREI. I'm afraid my wife may stop me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Oh, I see.

ANDREI. I won't play today. I'll just sit and watch. I'm not feeling well. What can I do about being short-winded, Doctor?

CHEBUTYKIN. Why ask me? I don't remember, dear boy. I don't know.

ANDREI. Let's go out through the kitchen. *(They go out.)*

There is a ring at the door, followed by another, and the sound of voices and laughing

IRINA *(comes in).* What's that?

ANFISSA *(in a whisper).* The mummers. *(Another ring.)*

IRINA. Tell them there's no one at home, Nanny. Say we're sorry.

Anfissa goes off. Irina walks round the room, deep in thought. She is upset. Enter Solyony

SOLYONY *(puzzled).* They've all gone. Where is everybody?

IRINA. They've gone home.

SOLYONY. That's strange. Are you on your own?

IRINA. Yes. *(Pause.)* Good-night.

SOLYONY. I behaved indiscreetly and tactlessly just now. But you are different from the rest. You are pure and high-minded. You can see the truth. You alone can understand me. I love you. I love you deeply, eternally.

IRINA. Good-night. Please go now.

SOLYONY. I can't live without you. *(Following her around.)* Oh, my bliss! *(Through tears.)* My happiness! I have never seen such lovely, exquisite eyes in any other woman.

IRINA *(coldly).* Please don't.

SOLYONY. This is the first time I have spoken to you of my love and I feel as if I were on another planet. *(Rubs his forehead.)* Oh well, what does it matter. I can't force you to love me, of course. But I won't suffer a successful rival. Oh, no. I swear to you by all that is sacred that I shall kill my rival. Oh, my wonderful one.

Natasha comes in with a candle

NATASHA *(looks into one room, then another and walks past the door of her husband's room).* Andrei's in there. Let him go on reading. *(To Solyony.)* Excuse me, I didn't know you were here. I'm not dressed for guests.

SOLYONY. It doesn't matter. Good-bye. *(Goes off.)*

NATASHA. You're tired, my poor dear. *(Kisses Irina.)* You ought to go to bed earlier.

IRINA. Is Bobbikins asleep?

NATASHA. Yes, but he's restless. By the way, Irina. I keep meaning to tell you, but either you're out or I'm busy. I think Bobbikins' room is too cold and damp. Yours would be just right for him. Be a good girl and move in with Olga for the time being.

IRINA *(not understanding).* Where?

Sound of harness bells on a troika driving up to the house

NATASHA. You and Olga can share a room for a while and Bobbikins will have your room. He's such a dear little lad. Today I said to him, "You're mine, Bobbikins. Mine!" and he gave me such a look with his sweet little eyes. *(The doorbell rings.)* That must be Olga. How late she is!

The maid goes up to her and whispers something in her ear

NATASHA. Protopopov? The funny man. Protopopov's arrived and wants me to go for a ride in his troika. *(Laughs.)* Aren't men funny? *(The doorbell rings.)* There's somebody at the door. Perhaps I'll go for a short

drive after all... *(To the maid.)* I'll be down in a minute. *(The doorbell rings.)* The doorbell again. That must be Olga. *(Goes out.)*

The maid runs out. Irina sits lost in thought. Enter Kulygin and Olga followed by Vershinin

KULYGIN. Well, how's that for you? And they said there was going to be a party.

VERSHININ. That's strange. I was here not long ago, about half an hour, and they were expecting the mummers.

IRINA. Everyone's gone.

KULYGIN. Masha as well? Where has she gone? And why is Protopopov waiting downstairs in his troika? Who's he waiting for?

IRINA. Don't keep asking me questions. I'm tired.

KULYGIN. Oh, alright, if you're in a mood...

OLGA. The meeting has only just finished. I'm worn out. Our headmistress is ill and I am deputising for her. I have such a dreadful headache. *(Sits down.)* Andrei lost two hundred roubles at cards last night. The whole town's talking about it.

KULYGIN. Yes. I'm tired after a meeting, as well. *(Sits down.)*

VERSHININ. My wife decided to give me a fright just now, and had another go at poisoning herself. It's alright now, and I'm glad. I can have a rest. So we've got to go, have we? Well, never mind. All the best to you. Let's go somewhere, Kulygin. I can't bear staying at home. I really can't. Come along.

KULYGIN. I'm too tired. I can't come with you. *(Gets up.)* I'm too tired. Has my wife gone home?

IRINA. I expect so.

KULYGIN *(kisses Irina's hand).* Good-bye. No work tomorrow or the day after. All the best! *(Walks off.)* I'd love a cup of tea. I was expecting to spend the evening in

pleasant company and—o, fallacem hominum spem!* Accusative case for interjections.

VERSHININ. Well, I'll go on my own then. *(Goes off with Kulygin, whistling.)*

OLGA. I have such a dreadful headache. Andrei lost at cards ... the whole town's talking about it. I'll go and lie down. *(Walks off.)* Tomorrow I'm free. Oh, how wonderful! I'm free tomorrow and the day after. This dreadful headache. *(Goes off.)*

IRINA *(alone).* Everyone's gone. There's no one left.

The sounds of an accordion outside and Anfissa singing

NATASHA *(walks across the hall in her fur coat and hat, followed by the maid).* I'll be back in half an hour. I'm just going for a little drive. *(Goes off.)*

IRINA *(left alone, longingly).* Moscow, Moscow, Moscow!

Curtain

ACT THREE

Olga's and Irina's room. Right and left are screened-off beds. It is getting on for three o'clock in the morning. The alarm bell is ringing off-stage for a fire which started some time ago. It is obvious that no one in the house has gone to bed yet. Masha is lying on the divan, wearing a black dress as usual. Enter Olga and Anfissa

ANFISSA. The little mites are sittin' by the staircase. "Why don't you go upstairs?" I says to them. "You can't stay here." "We don't know where Dad is," they says, cryin' their hearts out. "Let's hope to goodness he hasn't died in the fire." Just think of that! And there are some in the yard—in their night-clothes, as well.

* Oh, how delusive is human hope!

OLGA *(takes some dresses out of the wardrobe).* Take this grey one ... and this one ... And the cardigan as well. And this skirt, Nanny. What a dreadful thing to happen. Kirsanov Street seems to have been burnt down completely. Take this one. And this one. *(Flings a dress into her hands.)* The poor Vershinins were frightened to death. Their house nearly burnt down. They should spend the night here. We mustn't let them go home. Poor Fedotik's place has been burnt down to the ground. He's lost everything.

ANFISSA. Ask Ferapont to give me a hand, Olga. I can't carry it all on my own.

OLGA *(rings the servants' bell).* They don't seem to hear. *(Through the door.)* Come here, whoever's out there. *(Through the open door you can see a window red from the glow of the fire. A fire engine is heard going past the house.)* How dreadful it is! And how tiresome!

Enter Ferapont

OLGA. Take these downstairs and give them to the Kolotilin girls. And this, too.

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. There was a fire in Moscow, too, in 1812. Goodness me! The Frenchies got the surprise of their life.

OLGA. Get along with you.

FERAPONT. Yes, Miss. *(Goes out.)*

OLGA. Give everything away, Nanny dear. We don't need anything. Give it all away, Nanny. I'm so tired I can hardly stand up. Don't let the Vershinins go home. The girls can sleep in the drawing-room, and we'll put the Colonel in with the Baron. Fedotik can go in with the Baron as well, or in the hall. The doctor's drunk, terribly drunk, now of all times, so we can't put anybody in with him. And Mrs Vershinin can sleep in the drawing-room as well.

ANFISSA *(exhausted).* Don't turn me out of the house, Olga! Please don't!

OLGA. What nonsense you're talking, Nanny! Nobody's going to turn you out.

ANFISSA *(resting her head on Olga's breast).* I do work, Olga, my love, I earns my keep. But when I get old and weak, they'll throw me out. And where will I go? I ask you. I'm in my eighties. Eighty-two next birthday.

OLGA. Sit down, Nanny. You're exhausted, you poor thing. *(Makes her sit down.)* Have a rest. You've gone quite pale.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA. They are talking about starting a fund for people whose homes have been burnt down. Why not? It's a very good idea. We must do all we can to help the poor. That's the duty of rich folk. Bobbikins and Sophie are sleeping peacefully as if nothing had happened. There are so many people in here, all over the place, the house is full of them. And there's a flu epidemic in the town. I'm afraid the children will catch it.

OLGA *(not listening to her).* You can't see the fire from this room. It's quiet in here...

NATASHA. Yes ... I must look an awful mess. *(In front of the mirror.)* They say I've put on weight, but it's not true. Not true at all. Masha's asleep. Worn out, the poor thing. *(To Anfissa, coldly.)* How dare you sit in my presence! Get up! Get out of here! *(Anfissa goes out. Pause.)* I can't understand why you keep that old woman on.

OLGA *(dumbfounded).* I'm sorry, but I don't understand either...

NATASHA. She's no use at all here. She's a peasant and she should live in the country. She's terribly spoilt. I like order in a house. There shouldn't be any useless people around. *(Strokes her cheek.)* You're tired, poor thing. Our headmistress is tired. When my Sophie grows up and goes to school, I shall be afraid of you.

OLGA. I'm not going to be headmistress.

NATASHA. They're going to appoint you, Olga. It's already been decided.

OLGA. I'll refuse. I can't. I haven't got the strength. *(Takes a drink of water.)* You were so rude to Nanny just now. I'm sorry, but I just can't bear it. It made me quite faint.

NATASHA *(contritely).* I'm sorry, Olga. I'm sorry. I didn't want to upset you.

Masha gets up, takes her pillow and goes out angrily

OLGA. Try to understand, my dear. We may have been brought up in a rather strange way, but I can't bear that. I find that sort of behaviour quite intolerable. It makes me ill. It depresses me terribly.

NATASHA. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. *(Kisses her.)*

OLGA. The slightest rudeness, a roughly spoken word, upsets me.

NATASHA. I often say things I shouldn't, it's true. But you must agree, Olga, she could live in the country.

OLGA. She's been with us for thirty years.

NATASHA. But she can't work now. Either I don't understand or you won't understand me. She's not capable of working. She only sleeps or sits around.

OLGA. Well, let her sit around.

NATASHA *(amazed).* Let her sit around! But she's a servant. *(Through tears.)* I don't understand you, Olga. I have a nanny and a wet nurse, and there are also a maid and a cook. What do we want that old woman for?

The alarm bell rings off-stage

OLGA. I've aged ten years tonight.

NATASHA. We'll have to come to an agreement, Olga. You're in charge at school, and I'm in charge at home. You've got your teaching, and I've got the house to run. If I say something about the servants, I know what I'm

talking about. I know what I am talking about! I want that thieving old hag out of the house by tomorrow! *(Stamps her foot.)* The old witch! Don't you dare annoy me! Don't you dare! *(Pulling herself together.)* If you don't move downstairs, we'll always be quarrelling. It's awful.

Enter Kulygin

KULYGIN. Where's Masha? It's time we went home. They say the fire is dying down now. *(Stretches.)* Only one district's burnt down, in spite of the wind. At first it looked as though the whole town was burning. *(Sits down.)* I'm worn out. Olga, my dear. I often think I would have married you, if it hadn't been for Masha. You're so good. I'm exhausted. *(Listens.)*

OLGA. What is it?

KULYGIN. The doctor is on a drinking spree, now of all times. He's as drunk as a lord. Now of all times! *(Gets up.)* I think he's coming. Can you hear him? Yes, he is. *(Laughs.)* What a devil, eh! I'll keep out of the way. *(Walks over to the cupboard and stands in the corner.)* What a rascal!

OLGA. He's kept off the bottle for two years, and now he goes and gets drunk all of a sudden. *(Walks into the background with Natasha.)*

Enter Chebutykin; he walks round the room as if he were sober, without staggering, stops, looks around, then goes to the washbasin and begins to wash his hands

CHEBUTYKIN *(morosely).* Damn and blast the lot of them! They think I am a doctor, that I can cure all sorts of diseases, but I don't know a bloody thing. I've forgotten everything I ever did know. Can't remember a bloody thing. *(Olga and Natasha go out unnoticed by him.)* Damn it! Last Wednesday I treated a woman in Zassip Street and she died. It was all my fault. Yes... I did know something twenty-five years ago, say, but now I can't remember a

bloody thing. Perhaps I'm not a human being at all. Perhaps I'm only pretending that I have hands and feet and a head. Perhaps I don't exist at all and only imagine that I am walking about, eating and sleeping. *(Weeps.)* Oh, if only I didn't exist! *(Stops crying, morosely.)* Damn it! The day before yesterday everyone was talking about Shakespeare and Voltaire at the club. I've never read either of them, but I pretended I had. And so did the others. It's disgusting. Degrading. What with thinking about the woman I killed on Wednesday, and everything else, I began to feel such a rat, such a filthy fraud, that I went on the bottle.

Enter Irina, Vershinin and Tusenbach; Tusenbach is wearing a new fashionable civilian suit

IRINA. Let's have a rest. No one will come in here.

VERSHININ. If it hadn't been for the soldiers the whole town would have burnt down. They were splendid! *(Rubs his hands with satisfaction.)* Absolutely splendid! What a fine lot they are!

KULYGIN *(comes up to them).* What's the time, everybody?

TUSENBACH. It's past three already. It's beginning to get light.

IRINA. Everyone's sitting in the hall. Nobody wants to go away. That Solyony of yours is there too. *(To Chebutykin.)* You ought to go to bed, Doctor.

CHEBUTYKIN. Thanking you kindly, Ma'am, but I'm perfectly alright. *(Combs his beard.)*

KULYGIN *(laughs).* You're drunk as a newt, Doctor! *(Slaps him on the back.)* Well done! *In vino veritas,* as the Romans said.

TUSENBACH. I've been asked to organise a concert in aid of the homeless.

IRINA. But who would...

TUSENBACH. We could organise one if we really tried. Masha plays the piano beautifully.

KULYGIN. Yes, beautifully.

IRINA. She's out of practice. She hasn't played for three years ... or is it four?

TUSENBACH. No one in this town has the faintest idea about music, no one at all, except me, and I assure you that Masha plays beautifully, almost professionally.

KULYGIN. You're right, Baron. I love Masha very much. She's a wonderful woman.

TUSENBACH. Just imagine being able to play so well and knowing that nobody, nobody at all, can appreciate it.

KULYGIN *(sighs).* Yes. But would it be quite proper for her to take part in a concert? *(Pause.)* I just don't know, perhaps it would be a good thing. Still I must confess that our headmaster, although he's an extremely upright and clever man, does have some rather strict ideas... It's nothing to do with him, of course, but all the same I think I'll have a word with him first, if you don't mind.

Chebutykin picks up the china clock and examines it

VERSHININ. I got very dirty at the fire. Look like nothing on earth. *(Pause.)* I heard something yesterday about our brigade being transferred a long way away. Some people think it may be Poland, others say Eastern Siberia.

TUSENBACH. I heard that too. The town will be quite empty.

IRINA. We'll be leaving as well.

CHEBUTYKIN *(drops the clock which breaks).* Smashed to smithereens!

Pause; everyone is upset and embarrassed

KULYGIN *(picking up the pieces).* Fancy breaking such a precious object. Oh, Doctor! Doctor! Nought minus for conduct.

IRINA. That was Mother's clock.

CHEBUTYKIN. Maybe it was. So what? Perhaps I didn't break it, and it only seems that I did. Perhaps we don't really exist at all, and it only seems to us that we do. I don't know anything. Nobody knows anything. *(By the door.)* Why are you looking at me like that? Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov and you don't notice it. You just sit here not noticing anything, while Natasha's having an affair with Protopopov. *(Sings.)* "Won't you take this pretty peach from me?" *(Goes out.)*

VERSHININ. Well, well. *(Laughs.)* How strange it all is. *(Pause.)* When the fire started I hurried home as fast as I could. As I got near the house I saw that it was still safe and sound, but my two daughters were standing at the front door in their nightdresses. Their mother was nowhere to be seen. People, horses and dogs were rushing about in a panic, and on my daughters' faces there was alarm, horror, entreaty, and I don't know what. My heart bled at the sight of those faces. Dear Lord, I thought, what other dreadful things are in store for these girls in their long lives. I snatched them up and began running. All the time I was thinking of what they would have to suffer in this world. *(The alarm bell rings; pause.)* I arrived here to be met by their mother shouting angrily.

Enter Masha with a pillow and sits down on the ottoman

And when I saw my daughters standing by the door in their night-clothes, and the street red from the fire, and the terrible commotion, I thought it must have been like this many years ago when the enemy suddenly invaded us, looting and burning. Yet what a difference there is between now and then! And in a short time from now, two or three hundred years, say, people will look back on our life today with horror and contempt, and everything about it will seem awkward and clumsy, inconvenient and strange. Oh, how wonderful life will be then! *(Laughs.)* Forgive me, I've started philosophising

again. But please let me go on. I do so want to talk. I feel in the mood for it. *(Pause.)* Everyone seems to be asleep. Well, as I was saying, it will be a wonderful life. Can you imagine it? There are only three people like you in this town now, but in future generations there will be more and more. And the time will come when everything will change, to be like you people will live like you, then you will grow outdated too and people will be born who are better than you. *(Laughs.)* I'm in a rather special mood today. Got a tremendous urge to enjoy life. *(Sings.)* "To love all ages are in thrall, her impulses are good for all..." *(Laughs.)*

MASHA. Trum-tum-tum!

VERSHININ. Tum-tum!

MASHA. Tra-ra-ra?

VERSHININ. Tra-ta-ta! *(Laughs.)*

Enter Fedotik

FEDOTIK *(dances).* It's burnt down! It's burnt down. Right down to the ground! *(Laughter.)*

IRINA. Has it really? Down to the ground?

FEDOTIK *(laughs).* Yes. Nothing left at all. My guitar, and the camera, and my letters—they've all gone. I wanted to give you a notebook, but that's gone too.

Enter Solyony

IRINA. Please go away. You can't come in here.

SOLYONY. Why is it alright for the Baron and not for me?

VERSHININ. We really must be going. What about the fire?

SOLYONY. They say it's dying down. I really would like to know why it's alright for the Baron and not for me. *(Takes out a bottle of perfume and sprinkles himself with it.)*

VERSHININ. Trum-tum-tum?

MASHA. Trum-tum!

VERSHININ *(laughs, to Solyony).* Let's go into the hall.

SOLYONY. Very well. We'll make a note of that. "My meaning I could make more clear, but that might tease the geese, I fear." *(Glancing at Tusenbach.)* Cluck, cluck, cluck. *(Goes out with Vershinin and Fedotik.)*

IRINA. That Solyony has filled the room with smoke. *(Bewildered.)* The Baron's asleep. Baron! Baron!

TUSENBACH *(waking up).* Goodness. I'm tired. A brick-kiln. I'm not talking nonsense. I'm starting work at a brick-kiln soon, really I am. I've fixed it up already. *(To Irina, tenderly.)* You're so pale, so lovely, so charming. Your pallor seems to brighten the dark air like a beam of moonlight. You're sad, dissatisfied with life. Come away with me. Let's go and work together.

MASHA. Please go away, Baron.

TUSENBACH *(laughing).* So you're here? I can't see you. *(Kisses Irina's hand.)* Good-bye. I am going now. Looking at you now I can't help remembering how gay and cheerful you were once, a long time ago, on your birthday, talking about the joys of work. And how I dreamed of a happy life. But where is it? *(Kisses her hand.)* There are tears in your eyes. Go to bed. It's already getting light. It's nearly morning. If only I might give my life for you!

MASHA. Please go away, Baron. What are you thinking of...

TUSENBACH. I'm going. *(Goes out.)*

MASHA *(lying down).* Are you asleep, Fyodor?

KULYGIN. What's that?

MASHA. Why don't you go home?

KULYGIN. Sweet Masha, darling Masha.

IRINA. She's worn out. Do let her have a rest.

KULYGIN. I'm just going. My wife is a good, fine woman. I love you, my one and only.

MASHA *(angrily).* Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant.

KULYGIN *(laughs).* She's wonderful, isn't she? We got married seven years ago, but it seems like yesterday. Honestly. You really are a wonderful woman, you know. I'm content, content, content!

MASHA. And I'm bored, bored, bored. *(Sits up.)* I just can't get it out of my head. It's disgraceful. It keeps preying on my mind. I must say something about it. I mean Andrei... He's mortgaged the house and his wife has pocketed all the money. But the house belongs to the four of us, not just him. He must know that if he's got an ounce of decency.

KULYGIN. Why raise the subject, Masha! What does it matter to you? Andrei is up to his neck in debt. Forget about it.

MASHA. It's disgraceful, all the same. *(Lies down.)*

KULYGIN. You and I aren't poor. I teach at the school and give private lessons. I'm a plain honest man. *Omnia mea mecum porto,** as they say.

MASHA. I don't want anything, but I can't stand injustice. *(Pause.)* Go home, Fyodor.

KULYGIN *(kisses her).* You're tired. Lie down for half an hour, I'll sit and wait for you downstairs. Have a little sleep. *(Going.)* I'm content, content, content. *(Goes out.)*

IRINA. It's true. How petty Andrei has become, how stale and old he's grown with that woman. He used to talk about becoming a professor, but yesterday he boasted about finally being made a member of the Local Council. He's a member and Protopopov is the chairman. The whole town's talking and laughing about it, and he's the only one who doesn't know or see anything. Everyone went out to help with the fire, but he's sitting in his room not taking the slightest interest. Just playing the violin. *(Nervily.)* It's

* All that I have I carry with me.

awful. Simply awful. *(Cries.)* I can't stand it. I can't stand it anymore! I really can't.

Olga comes in and tidies up her table

(Sobbing loudly). Throw me out! Throw me out! I can't stand it anymore.

OLGA *(alarmed).* What's the matter? What is it, my dear?

IRINA *(sobbing).* Where has it all gone? Where? Oh, God! I've forgotten everything. Everything is all mixed up in my head. I can't remember the Italian for "window" or "ceiling". I'm forgetting everything. Each day I forget something else, and life is passing by and it will never return. And we'll never go to Moscow. I know we won't.

OLGA. There, there, my dear!

IRINA. *(restraining herself).* I'm so unhappy. I can't work. I won't work. I've had enough. First I worked at the telegraph office and now I've got a job at the Local Council, and I hate and despise everything I am given to do. I'm twenty-three, I've been working for a long time, my brain has dried up, I've got thin, old and ugly, and there's nothing, nothing, no satisfaction! Time is passing and I seem to be moving away from the real, beautiful life, moving further and further away into a kind of chasm. I'm in complete despair, and how I'm still alive, how I haven't killed myself yet, I don't understand.

OLGA. Don't cry, my sweet, don't cry. It hurts me so.

IRINA. I'm not crying. I won't cry. That's enough. See, I'm not crying any more. That's enough.

OLGA. I'm speaking to you as a sister, as a friend, my dear. If you want my advice, you should marry the Baron.

Irina weeps softly

You do respect him, think highly of him, don't you? I know he's not good-looking, but he's such a decent, good person. Women don't get married for love. It's their duty. That's my

opinion, at least, and I would marry without love. I would marry anyone who asked me, so long as he was a good person. Even an old man.

IRINA. I kept waiting for us to move to Moscow. I thought I would meet the right person there. I dreamt about him, loved him. But it all turned out to be nonsense.

OLGA *(embraces her sister).* I understand everything, my sweet. When the Baron resigned from the army and came to see us in his civilian clothes, he looked so unattractive that I actually burst into tears. He asked me why I was crying, but I could hardly tell him. Yet if you were to marry him I should be so happy. That's quite a different matter.

Natasha walks across the stage in silence with a candle from the door right to the door left

MASHA *(sits up).* The way she walks you would think she had set fire to the town herself.

OLGA. You're so silly, Masha. The silliest one in the family, that's you. Forgive me for saying so. *(Pause.)*

MASHA. I want to confess to you, my dear sisters. My heart is heavy. I'll confess to you and never say a word to anyone else ever. I'll tell you now. *(Softly.)* It's my secret, but you must know. I can't keep it to myself. *(Pause.)* I'm in love. I'm in love with that man. You saw him just now. Well, why not say it outright. I'm in love with Colonel Vershinin.

OLGA *(goes behind her screen).* Stop it. I'm not listening anyway.

MASHA. There's nothing I can do about it. *(Clasps her head.)* At first I thought he was strange, then I felt sorry for him ... then I fell in love with him. Fell in love with his voice, his words, his troubles, his two daughters...

OLGA *(behind the screen).* I'm not listening anyway. Say any foolish things you like, but I'm not listening.

MASHA. Oh, you're the foolish one, Olga. I'm in love. It's fate. It's the way things had to be. And he loves me too. It's terrible, isn't it? It's wrong, isn't it? *(She takes Irina's hand and draws her closer.)* Oh, my dear. How are we to live? What is to become of us? When you read a love story it all seems so old-fashioned, so obvious, but when you fall in love yourself you realise that nobody knows anything and that each of us must decide for himself. Oh, my dear, dear sisters. I've confessed to you, and now I shall be silent. Like Gogol's madman ... silence ... silence.

Enter Andrei, followed by Ferapont

ANDREI *(angrily).* What do you want? I don't understand.

FERAPONT *(standing in the doorway, impatiently).* I've told you half a dozen times, Master Andrei.

ANDREI. In the first place, I'm "sir" and not Master Andrei.

FERAPONT. The firemen want permission to drive straight down to the river through your orchard, sir. It's a devil of a job going round the long way.

ANDREI. All right. Tell them they may. *(Ferapont goes out.)* I'm fed up with them. Where's Olga? *(Olga comes out from behind the screen.)* It's you I came to see. Can you give me the key of the cupboard. I've lost mine. You know, that very tiny one.

Olga gives him the key in silence; Irina goes behind her screen; pause

What a fire! It's dying down now. Ferapont annoyed me, damn it, and I said something silly to him. Sir. Indeed. *(Pause.)* Why are you so silent, Olga? *(Pause.)* It's time we dropped all this nonsense and stopped sulking for no reason at all. Masha's here, so is Irina. Fine. We can have it out once and for all. What have you got against me? Eh?

OLGA. Stop it, Andrei. We'll talk about it tomorrow. *(Agitatedly.)* What an awful night!

ANDREI *(very embarrassed).* Don't get upset. I'm asking you quite calmly: what have you got against me? Tell me straight.

VERSHININ'S VOICE. Trum-tum-tum!

MASHA *(gets up, loudly).* Tra-ta-ta! *(To Olga.)* Good-bye, Olga, God bless. *(Goes behind the screen and kisses Irina.)* Sweet dreams. Good-bye, Andrei. Go away. They're worn out. You can have your talk tomorrow. *(Goes out.)*

OLGA. Yes, do let's put it off until tomorrow, Andrei. *(Goes behind her screen.)* It's time we were all in bed.

ANDREI. I'll just say what I have to say, then go. First of all, you've got something against Natasha, my wife. I've noticed it ever since the day we got married. Natasha is a fine, honest woman, decent and upright. That's what I believe. I love and respect my wife, do you understand? I respect her and demand that others respect her too. I repeat, she is an honest, decent person, and all your objections to her are just sheer caprice, pardon me. *(Pause.)* Secondly, you seem to be annoyed that I'm not a professor and not engaged in academic work. But I do serve on the Local Council. I'm a member of the Council and to my mind that is as noble and worthy as serving science. I'm a member of the Council and proud of it, if you want to know... *(Pause.)* Thirdly ... I have something else to say ... I mortgaged the house without asking your permission. I shouldn't have done that, I know, and I ask you to forgive me. I was driven to it by debts—thirty-five thousand. I don't play cards anymore, gave it up a long time ago, but the main thing I can say to justify myself is that you girls get Father's pension, whereas I had nothing, no income, that is... *(Pause.)*

KULYGIN *(at the door).* Masha's not here? *(Anxiously.)* Where can she be? That's strange... *(Goes out.)*

ANDREI. They're not listening. Natasha is a fine, honest woman. *(Paces the stage in silence, then stops.)* When I got married I thought we would be happy ... all of us. But, my God! *(Weeps.)* My dear sisters, my darling sisters, don't believe me, don't believe a word I say... *(Goes out.)*

KULYGIN *(at the door, anxiously).* Where is Masha? She's not here? That's funny. (Goes out.)

The alarm bell rings, the stage is empty

IRINA *(behind her screen).* Olga! Who's that knocking on the floor downstairs?

OLGA. It's the doctor. He's drunk.

IRINA. What a disturbing night! *(Pause.)* Olga! *(Looks round the screen.)* Did you hear? The brigade's going away, they're transferring it to somewhere far away.

OLGA. That's only a rumour.

IRINA. We'll be left here all on our own. Olga!

OLGA. What is it?

IRINA. I respect the Baron and think very highly of him. He's a fine person. I will marry him. I agree. But let's go to Moscow. Let's go, please. There's nowhere better than Moscow in the whole world. Please, let's go, Olga!

Curtain

ACT FOUR

The grounds of the Prozorovs' house. A long avenue of firs leading to the river. The opposite bank is forested. Right is the terrace of the house with a table on which there are bottles and glasses. People have obviously just been drinking champagne. It is noon. Now and then people walk through the garden on their way from the street to the river. Five soldiers march past quickly. Chebutykin in an amiable mood, which does not desert him

throughout the act, is sitting in an armchair waiting to be summoned. He is wearing an army cap and carrying a stick. Irina, Kulygin with a medal round his neck and no moustache, and Tusenbach are standing on the terrace saying good-bye to Fedotik and Rodé who are walking down the steps. Both officers are in field dress

TUSENBACH *(embraces Fedotik).* You're such a nice person. We had such good times together. *(Embraces Rodé.)* Let me embrace you again. Good-bye, my dear friend.

IRINA. Au revoir!

FEDOTIK. It's good-bye, not au revoir. We shall never meet again.

KULYGIN. Who knows! *(Wipes his eyes and smiles.)* Look at me—crying too.

IRINA. We'll meet again one day.

FEDOTIK. In ten or fifteen years? But then we'll hardly recognise one another. We'll just exchange a polite hello. *(Takes a photograph.)* Stand still, please! Just one more.

RODÉ *(embraces Tusenbach).* We shall never meet again. *(Kisses Irina's hand.)* Thank you for everything, everything.

FEDOTIK *(irritatedly).* Oh, do stand still!

TUSENBACH. God willing, we shall meet again. But write to us. Be sure to write.

RODÉ *(looking round at the garden).* Good-bye, trees! *(Shouts.)* Hup! Hup! *(Pause.)* Farewell, echo!

KULYGIN. Who knows, you may get married there in Poland. Your Polish wife will embrace you and say "Kohane". *(Laughs.)*

FEDOTIK *(looking at his watch).* We've less than an hour left. Solyony is the only one from our battery who is going on the barge. We're with the infantry unit. Three divisional batteries are leaving today and another three tomorrow. Then there'll be peace and quiet in the town.

TUSENBACH. And deadly boredom.

RODÉ. Where is Mrs Kulygin?

KULYGIN. She's in the garden.

FEDOTIK. I'd like to say good-bye to her.

RODÉ. Good-bye, everybody. We must go, or I'll start crying too. *(Quickly embraces Tusenbach and Kulygin, kisses Irina's hand.)* We've enjoyed living here so much.

FEDOTIK *(to Kulygin).* Here's a little keepsake for you ... a notebook and pencil. We'll go down this way to the river. *(They walk off, both looking back from time to time.)*

RODÉ *(shouting).* Hup! Hup!

KULYGIN *(shouting).* Good-bye!

In the background Fedotik and Rodé meet Masha and say good-bye to her; she walks along with them

IRINA. They've gone. *(Sits down on the bottom step of the terrace.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. And they forgot to say good-bye to me.

IRINA. Well, why didn't you?

CHEBUTYKIN. I forgot too. Still, I'll be seeing them again soon. I'm leaving tomorrow. Yes. One more day to go. In a year from now they'll retire me and I'll come back here and live out the rest of my days near you. Only one year to go before I get my pension. *(Puts his newspaper into his pocket and takes out another one.)* I'll come back to you and turn over a completely new leaf. I'll be quiet and ... and docile ... and well-behaved.

IRINA. Yes, it's time you turned over a new leaf, Doctor. You really should.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. I know. *(Sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay! I'm in the soup today!

KULYGIN. You're incorrigible, Doctor. Quite incorrigible.

CHEBUTYKIN. I should have you as a teacher. Then I'd soon be corrected.

IRINA. Fyodor has shaved off his moustache. I can't bear to look at him.

KULYGIN. Why?

CHEBUTYKIN. I could say what you look like. But I daren't.

KULYGIN. So what? That's the custom nowadays, the *modus vivendi.* Our headmaster has shaved his moustache off, and when I became deputy head I shaved mine off as well. Nobody likes it, but I don't care. I am content. With or without a moustache, I am content. *(Sits down.)*

In the background Andrei is pushing a pram with a sleeping child

IRINA. Dear Doctor, I'm terribly worried. You were out on the boulevard yesterday. Please tell me what happened there.

CHEBUTYKIN. What happened? Oh, it was nothing. Nothing at all. *(Reads the newspaper.)* It makes no difference.

KULYGIN. They say that Solyony and the Baron met on the boulevard yesterday outside the theatre...

TUSENBACH. Oh, do stop that. Really. *(Waves his hand and goes into the house.)*

KULYGIN. ...outside the theatre. Solyony began picking a quarrel with the Baron, who lost his temper and said something offensive.

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. It's all nonsense.

KULYGIN. I remember a teacher writing "nonsense" in Russian on a seminary student's essay, and the student read it out as "renyxa" thinking it was in Roman letters. *(Laughs.)* Isn't that amusing! They say Solyony is in love with Irina and that he hates the Baron. That's understandable enough. Irina is a very nice young lady. She's even rather like Masha, thoughtful like Masha. But you have a

sweeter nature, Irina. Although Masha is very sweet-natured, as well. I love Masha.

Off-stage, from the garden: "Halloo! Hup! Hup!"

IRINA *(starts).* I seem to be frightened by everything today. *(Pause.)* It's all ready. I'm going to send off my luggage after lunch. The Baron and I are getting married tomorrow and leaving straight after the wedding for the brick-kiln. The next day I shall be teaching in a school. We'll begin our new life. With God's help. When I passed the teacher's exam I actually wept with joy. *(Pause.)* They'll be coming to take the luggage to the station soon.

KULYGIN. That's as may be, but somehow it doesn't sound serious. Just a lot of ideas, not really serious. Still I wish you all the best from the bottom of my heart.

CHEBUTYKIN *(with much feeling).* My dear, sweet girl. My angel. You've gone so far ahead, there's no catching you up. And I am limping along behind like a migrant bird who has grown too old to fly any more. But you fly away, my darlings, fly away, and God bless you. *(Pause.)* You shouldn't have shaved off your moustache, Kulygin.

KULYGIN. Oh, do stop it! *(Sighs.)* The soldiers are going today and everything will return to normal again. Whatever people may say, Masha is a good, honest woman. I love her very much and I am happy with my lot. How differently life treats people. There's a man called Kozyrev who works in the local excise office. We went to school together, but he was expelled from the fifth form because he could not master the intricacies of the *ut consecutivum.* He's terribly hard up now and in poor health. Whenever we meet I say "How are you, *ut consecutivum?*" "Yes, indeed," he replies, "that's just it, *consecutivum*", and starts coughing. But I've been lucky all my life. I'm a happy man. I've even got the order of Stanislav, second class, and now I am teaching others the

ut consecutivum. I'm clever, of course, cleverer than a good many people, but that's not what makes you happy...

The Maiden's Prayer is being played inside on the piano

IRINA. Tomorrow evening I won't have to listen to *The Maiden's Prayer* or see Protopopov. *(Pause.)* Protopopov's sitting in the drawing-room. He's there again today.

KULYGIN. Has our headmistress arrived yet?

IRINA. No. Someone's gone to fetch her. If you only knew how hard it is living here alone, without Olga. She lives up at the school now. She's headmistress, with plenty to do all day, but I'm all alone, with time on my hands, and I hate the room I live in. So I decided that if I was fated not to go to Moscow, that was that. I would resign myself to it. As the good Lord wills. Then the Baron proposed to me. I thought it over and accepted him. He's a good man, an incredibly good man. And I suddenly felt as if my heart had grown wings. My spirits soared and back came the old longing to work. But something happened yesterday, some secret threat is hanging over me.

CHEBUTYKIN. Renyxa! Nonsense!

NATASHA *(through the window).* The headmistress is here!

KULYGIN. The headmistress has arrived. Let's go in.

Goes into the house with Irina

CHEBUTYKIN *(reads the paper and sings quietly).* Ta-ra-ra-boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today.

Masha approaches; Andrei is wheeling the pram in the background

MASHA. There he sits, not a care in the world.

CHEBUTYKIN. And why not?

MASHA *(sits down).* Oh, nothing. *(Pause.)* Did you love my mother?

CHEBUTYKIN. Very much.

MASHA. And did she love you?

CHEBUTYKIN *(after a pause).* That I don't remember.

MASHA. Is my man here? That's what our cook Marfa used to call her policeman. "My man." Is my man here?

CHEBUTYKIN. No, not yet.

MASHA. When you snatch your happiness in little pieces and then suddenly lose it, like I have, you find yourself gradually getting coarse and shrewish. *(Pointing at her chest.)* I can feel the bitterness inside me. *(Looking at Andrei who is wheeling the pram.)* There's old Andrei, our dear brother. All our hopes have come to nought. It took thousands of people to raise the bell and much money and labour was spent on it, then it suddenly fell and broke into pieces. And so did Andrei.

ANDREI. When are we going to get some peace and quiet in this house? It's so noisy.

CHEBUTYKIN. Soon. *(Looks at his watch.)* I've got an old watch. It chimes the hour. *(Winds it and it chimes.)* The first, second and fifth batteries are leaving at one o'clock sharp. *(Pause.)* And I'm going tomorrow.

ANDREI. Forever?

CHEBUTYKIN. I don't know. Perhaps I'll come back next year. Although goodness only knows. It makes no difference.

The sound of a harp and violin being played in the distance

ANDREI. The town will be empty. As if it had been snuffed out. *(Pause.)* Something happened yesterday outside the theatre. Everyone's talking about it, but I don't know what it was.

CHEBUTYKIN. It was nothing. Solyony started picking a quarrel with the Baron, who got into a temper and insulted him. In the end Solyony had to challenge him to a duel. *(Looks at his watch.)* It's about time now... Half past twelve in the grove, the one you can see on the other side of the river. Bang-bang! *(Laughs.)* Solyony thinks he's

Lermontov. Even writes poetry. But joking apart, this is his third duel.

MASHA. Whose?

CHEBUTYKIN. Solyony's.

MASHA. And what about the Baron?

CHEBUTYKIN. What about the Baron? *(Pause.)*

MASHA. My head's going round... You shouldn't allow it, you know. He might wound the Baron or even kill him.

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron's a nice person, but one baron more or less doesn't make much difference, does it? Let them duel. What does it matter! *(Shouts of "Halloo! Hup! Hup!" from outside the garden.)* You can wait. That's Skvortsov, one of the seconds. He's in the boat. *(Pause.)*

ANDREI. I think taking part in a duel or being present at one even as a doctor is quite immoral.

CHEBUTYKIN. It only seems so. In fact, we're not here, nothing is here, we don't exist, it just seems as though we do. And what difference does it make, anyway?

MASHA. They talk and talk all day long. *(Walking away.)* You live in a climate where it might start snowing at any minute, and they have to talk like this as well. *(Stops.)* I'm not going into the house. I can't go in there. Tell me when Colonel Vershinin comes. *(Walks off down the avenue.)* The birds are already migrating. *(Looks up.)* Swans or geese. Lucky things. *(Goes off.)*

ANDREI. There will be no one left in the house. The officers are leaving, you are going and my sister is getting married. I shall be left on my own.

CHEBUTYKIN. What about your wife?

Ferapont comes in with some papers

ANDREI. A wife's a wife. She's an honest, decent woman, well, a kind woman, but still there's something about her that reduces her to the level of a mean, blind animal, something rough to the touch. In any case she isn't a human being. I'm telling you this as my friend, as the

only person in whom I can confide. I love Natasha, that's true, but at times she seems incredibly vulgar and then I feel lost. I don't understand why I love her so much, or at least why I did love her.

CHEBUTYKIN *(getting up).* I'm going away tomorrow, my lad, and we may never meet again. My advice to you is this. Put on your hat, pick up your stick, and get out. Start walking and don't look back. And the farther you go, the better.

Solyony walks past in the background with two officers; seeing Chebutykin, he turns towards him; the officers walk on

SOLYONY. It's time, Doctor. Half past twelve. *(Greets Andrei.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. I'm just coming. I'm sick and tired of the lot of you. *(To Andrei.)* If anyone asks for me, Andrei, tell them I'll be back in a minute. *(Sighs.)* Dear, oh dear!

SOLYONY. "He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death!" *(Walks along with him.)* Why are you wheezing, old man?

CHEBUTYKIN. So what?

SOLYONY. Feeling all right?

CHEBUTYKIN *(angrily).* Fit as a fiddle.

SOLYONY. No need to worry, old man. I'm only going to wing him like a woodcock. *(Takes out some perfume and sprinkles it over his hands.)* I've used up a whole flask today and they still smell—like a corpse. *(Pause.)* Yes. "And he, the rebel, seeks the storm, as though the storm will bring him peace."

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes. "He scarce had time to catch his breath, before the bear was hugging him to death!" *(Goes off with Solyony.)*

Shouts of "Hup! Halloo!" Enter Andrei and Ferapont

FERAPONT. Papers to sign, sir...

ANDREI *(irritably).* Oh, do leave me alone! Please! *(Goes off with the pram.)*

FERAPONT. But that's what papers are for—to be signed. *(Retires into the background.)*

Enter Irina and Tusenbach in a straw hat. Kulygin walks across the stage calling "Masha! Where are you?"

TUSENBACH. I think he's the only person in the town who is glad that the regiment is leaving.

IRINA. You can see why. *(Pause.)* The place will be deserted.

TUSENBACH. I'll be back in a minute, darling.

IRINA. Where are you going?

TUSENBACH. I've got to go into town and then ... see off some friends.

IRINA. That's not true. Why are you so preoccupied today, Nicholas? *(Pause.)* What happened outside the theatre yesterday?

TUSENBACH *(with an impatient gesture).* I shall be back and with you again in an hour. *(Kisses her hands.)* My sweet darling. *(Looks into her eyes.)* It's five years since I fell in love with you, and I still can't get used to it. You seem more and more beautiful to me. That wonderful hair. Those lovely eyes! I shall take you away tomorrow and we will work. We shall be rich. My dreams will come true. You will be happy. But there's only one thing missing: you don't love me.

IRINA. That's not within my power. I will be your wife, and I shall be true to you and obey you, but I don't love you. I can't help it. *(Weeps.)* I've never been in love. Oh, how I've dreamed of love, dreamed of it for years on end, night and day, but my heart is like a piano that is locked and the key is lost. *(Pause.)* You look worried.

TUSENBACH. I didn't sleep last night. There's nothing in my life that frightens me. The only thing that

torments me and keeps me from sleeping is that lost key. Say something to me. *(Pause.)* Say something.

IRINA. What? What can I say? What?

TUSENBACH. Anything.

IRINA. That's enough. That's enough. *(Pause.)*

TUSENBACH. It's strange how the merest trifles sometimes become important in our lives, quite suddenly, without any rhyme or reason. You go on laughing at them and thinking they're rubbish, yet you realise that there is no turning back. But let's not talk about that. I feel quite gay. It's as if I were seeing those firs, maples and birch trees for the first time, and they were all looking at me curiously and waiting. How beautiful those trees are and how beautiful the life around them should be, when you come to think about it. *(Shouts of "Halloo! Hup! Hup!")* I must go. It's time. That tree over there has died, but it's still swaying in the wind with the others. And I can't help feeling that if I were to die, I'd still go on taking part in life one way or another. Good-bye, my sweet. *(Kisses her hands.)* The papers you gave me are on my desk under the calender.

IRINA. I'll come with you.

TUSENBACH *(uneasily).* No, no! *(Walks away quickly and stops in the avenue.)* Irina!

IRINA. Yes?

TUSENBACH *(not knowing what to say).* I haven't had my coffee today. Ask them to make me some, will you? *(Goes off quickly.)*

Irina stands lost in thought, then retires into the background and sits on a swing. Enter Andrei with the pram, followed by Ferapont

FERAPONT. They're not my papers, you know, sir. They're official ones. I didn't make them up.

ANDREI. Oh, where has it gone, my past? When I was young, gay and clever, when my dreams and thoughts were noble ones, when my present and future were bright with

hope? Why is it that before we've hardly begun to live, we become dull, drab, uninteresting, lazy, indifferent, useless and unhappy? This town is two hundred years old and it has a hundred thousand inhabitants, yet not one of them is at all different from the others. Not one great man—now or in the past—not one scientist or artist, not one person who stands out even slightly and who could arouse envy or the passionate urge to imitate him. All they do is eat, drink, sleep and then die. Others are born and they too eat, drink, sleep and bring a little variety into their lives to relieve the deadly tedium with vicious gossip, drink, cards, or taking one another to court. The wives deceive the husbands, and the husbands lie and pretend they don't see or hear anything, and their incredibly vulgar influence has such a stifling effect on the children that the divine spark in them is extinguished, and they become wretched, lifeless creatures as similar to one another as their fathers and mothers. *(To Ferapont, angrily.)* What do you want?

FERAPONT. The papers have got to be signed.

ANDREI. I'm sick and tired of you.

FERAPONT *(handing him the papers).* The cloakroom attendant at the town hall said the temperature dropped to two hundred below freezing in St. Petersburg.

ANDREI. The present is hateful, but when I think about the future my heart leaps. The worry and constriction disappear. There is a glimmering of light in the distance, and I can see freedom, I can see myself and my children becoming free from idleness, from *kvass,* from goose with stewed cabbage, from after-dinner naps, from loafing our lives away.

FERAPONT. They say two thousand people died of the cold. Everybody was in a real panic. Can't remember whether it was in Petersburg or Moscow.

ANDREI *(overcome with tenderness).* My dear sisters! My darling sisters! *(Through tears.)* Masha, my dear.

NATASHA *(through the window).* Who's that talking so

loudly? Is it you, Andrei? You'll wake Sophie up. *Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormée déjà. Vous êtes un ours.** *(Getting angry.)* If you want to talk, give the pram to someone else. Ferapont, take the pram from the master!

FERAPONT. Yes, Ma'am *(Takes the pram.)*

ANDREI *(disconcerted).* But I wasn't talking very loudly.

NATASHA *(fondling her son by the window).* Bobbikins! You naughty boy! You little scamp!

ANDREI *(looking at the papers).* Right. I'll look them over and sign what's necessary, then you can take them back to the Board.

Goes into the house reading the papers. Ferapont wheels the pram into the background

NATASHA *(by the window).* What's your mummy's name, Bobbikins? You clever boy! And who's that? That's your Aunty Olga. Say "Hello, Aunty Olga!"

Some wandering musicians, a man and a girl, come up and start playing the violin and the harp. Vershinin, Olga and Anfissa come out of the house and listen for a moment in silence. Irina goes up to them

OLGA. Our garden's like a public thoroughfare, what with everybody walking and driving through it. Give the musicians something, Nanny.

ANFISSA *(gives the musicians some money).* And God bless you, my dears. *(The musicians bow their thanks and go off.)* Ee, but they're miserable folk. You don't play on a full stomach. *(To Irina.)* Hello, my love. *(Kisses her.)* You should see me now, my lass. Living up at the school with Olga. The good Lord's provided for me in my old age. Never been so well off in all my life. It's a big flat, and I have my own little room and a bed. All belongs to the

* You mustn't make a noise. Sophie is asleep. You are a boor.

school. I wake up of a night and—glory be, if I'm not the happiest soul alive.

VERSHININ *(looking at his watch).* We're leaving soon, Olga. I must be going. *(Pause.)* I wish you all the very, very best... Where is Masha?

IRINA. She's in the garden. I'll go and find her.

VERSHININ. Do please. I'm in a hurry.

ANFISSA. I'll go and look for her, too. *(Shouts.)* Masha! Where are you? *(Goes off with Irina into the garden.)* Masha!

VERSHININ. All good things come to an end. Here I am saying good-bye to you all. *(Looks at his watch.)* They gave us a sort of official lunch at the town hall. We had champagne and the big-wigs made speeches. I ate and listened, but in my heart I was here, with you. *(Looks round at the garden.)* I've got used to you all.

OLGA. Do you think we shall ever meet again?

VERSHININ. Probably not. *(Pause.)* My wife and two girls will be staying on here for a month or two. If anything should happen or if they should need anything, would you...

OLGA. Yes, yes, of course. Don't worry on that account. *(Pause.)* There won't be a single army man left in the town tomorrow. Everything will just be memories. And of course we'll be starting a new life. *(Pause.)* Things never turn out as we want. I didn't want to be headmistress, but now I am. So we won't be going to Moscow after all.

VERSHININ. Well. Thank you for everything. Forgive me, if things weren't quite as they should be. I did talk an awful lot—forgive me for that, too. And don't think badly of me.

OLGA *(wiping her eyes).* What's happened to Masha?

VERSHININ. What else shall I say to you before I go? What shall I philosophise about? *(Laughs.)* Life is hard. To many of us it seems bleak and void of hope, but all the

same it is getting brighter and easier, and the time is probably not far off when it will shine forth in all its glory. *(Looks at his watch.)* I must be going. In the old days men waged wars. Their lives were taken up with campaigns, invasions and victories. Now all that has disappeared leaving an enormous gap which man has not yet learnt how to fill. But he is searching hard and is bound to find something. If only he would find it quickly! *(Pause.)* What we need is not only hard work, but education. Not only education, but hard work. *(Looks at his watch.)* I really must be going.

OLGA. Here she is.

Enter Masha

VERSHININ. I've come to say good-bye. *(Olga walks away a little so as not to disturb their leave-taking.)*

MASHA *(gazing at his face.)* Good-bye. *(A long kiss.)*

OLGA. That's enough.

Masha sobs bitterly

VERSHININ. Write to me. Don't forget! Let me go now—it's time. Olga, take her, please. I must go. I'm late already. *(Deeply moved, he kisses Olga's hands, then embraces Masha once again and goes out quickly.)*

OLGA. There, there, Masha! That will do, my dear.

Enter Kulygin

KULYGIN *(embarrassed).* Never mind, never mind. Let her have a little cry. Good Masha! Nice Masha! You're my wife and I'm happy, whatever happens. I'm not complaining. I don't reproach you. Olga is my witness. We'll go on living as we used to, and I won't say a single word to you, or make the slightest hint...

MASHA *(restraining her sobs).* A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. And on that

oak a chain of gold ... I'm going mad! A green oak ... by the curving shore...

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. Calm down. *(To Kulygin.)* Give her a drink of water.

MASHA. I'm not crying anymore.

KULYGIN. She's not crying anymore. She's a good girl.

The dull report of a distant shot is heard

MASHA. A green oak by the curving shore, and on that oak a chain of gold. Green cat ... green oak ... I'm getting muddled. *(Takes a drink of water.)* My life is ruined ... I want nothing now. I'll be all right in a minute. What does it matter? What's a curving shore, anyway? Why can't I get it out of my head? My thoughts are all confused.

Enter Irina

OLGA. Calm down, Masha. There's a good girl. Let's go inside.

MASHA *(angrily).* I'm not going in there. *(Bursts into sobs, but stops immediately.)* I won't go in there now. I'm never going into that house again.

IRINA. Let's just sit down together and be quiet for a minute. I'm going away tomorrow, after all... *(Pause.)*

KULYGIN. I confiscated this false beard and moustache from a boy in the third form yesterday. *(Puts on the false beard and moustache.)* I look like our German teacher, don't I? *(Laughs.)* Those boys are funny little devils.

MASHA. Yes, you do look like the German teacher.

OLGA *(laughs).* So you do.

Masha starts crying

IRINA. Don't, Masha.

KULYGIN. Very like him.

Enter Natasha

NATASHA *(to the maid).* What's that? Mr Protopopov will sit with little Sophie and the master can wheel Bobbikins in the pram. Children never give you a moment's rest. *(To Irina.)* Such a pity you're going tomorrow. Couldn't you stay on for another week? *(Screams as she catches sight of Kulygin, who laughs and takes off the mask.)* You naughty man! You gave me such a fright! *(To Irina.)* I've got so fond of you. It's not easy to say good-bye, you know. I've told them to put Andrei in your room—let him fiddle away in there. And we'll move little Sophie to his. She's such an angel! Such a pretty little girl. Today she looked at me with her big eyes and said "Mama"!

KULYGIN. Yes, she is a lovely child.

NATASHA. So tomorrow I shall be on my own here. *(Sighs.)* The first thing I'll do is have that avenue of firs cut down, then that maple... It looks so ugly of an evening. *(To Irina.)* That belt doesn't suit you at all, dear. It's in rather bad taste. You should wear something brighter. I'll have nothing but flowers here, and they'll smell so lovely. *(Strictly.)* What's that fork doing on the bench? *(Walks off to the house, to the maid.)* I said, what's that fork doing on the bench? *(Screams.)* Hold your tongue!

KULYGIN. There she goes again.

A march is being played off-stage. They all listen

OLGA. They're leaving.

Enter Chebutykin

MASHA. Yes, they're leaving. Well, here's wishing them a safe journey. *(To her husband.)* We must go home. Where's my hat and cloak?

KULYGIN. I took them inside. I'll get them.

OLGA. Yes, now we can all go home. It's time.

CHEBUTYKIN. Just a moment, Olga.

OLGA. What? *(Pause.)* What is it?

CHEBUTYKIN. Nothing... I don't know how to tell you... *(Whispers in her ear.)*

OLGA *(horrified).* It's not true.

CHEBUTYKIN. Yes it is. An awful business. I'm worn out, exhausted. I don't want to talk about it. *(Irritatedly.)* It makes no difference anyway.

MASHA. What's happened?

OLGA *(putting her arms around Irina).* What a dreadful day! I don't know how to tell you, my dear.

IRINA. What's happened? Tell me quickly. Please! *(Starts crying.)*

CHEBUTYKIN. The Baron has just been killed in a duel.

IRINA *(weeping softly).* I knew it. I knew it.

CHEBUTYKIN *(sits down on a bench in the background.)* I'm worn out. *(Takes a newspaper out of his pocket.)* Let them have a good cry. *(Sings quietly.)* Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today. What difference does it make?

The three sisters are standing with their arms round one another

MASHA. Oh, listen to the music. They're going away from us. One has already gone, gone forever. And we shall be left alone to start our lives anew. We must live. We must live.

IRINA *(lays her head on Olga's breast).* The time will come when there will be no more secrets, when the reason for all this suffering will be made clear. But till then we must live, we must work, nothing but work! Tomorrow I shall leave alone. I shall go and teach in a school, and devote my life to those who may need it. It is autumn now. Winter will soon be here and everything will be covered with snow. But I shall be working, working.

OLGA *(embraces her two sisters).* The music is so gay and cheerful, I do so want to live. Oh, dear! Time will pass and we shall be gone forever. We shall be forgotten, and

people will no longer remember our faces and voices. But our sufferings will turn into joy for those who live after us. There will be peace and happiness on earth, and we who live now will be remembered with gratitude and a blessing. Oh, my dear sisters, our lives are not finished yet. We shall go on living! The music is so gay and cheerful. As if any minute now we shall find out why we are alive and why we are suffering. Oh, if only we knew! If only we knew!

The music is growing fainter and fainter; Kulygin comes in, happy and smiling, with Masha's hat and cloak; Andrei is wheeling Bobbikins in the pram

CHEBUTYKIN *(sings quietly).* Ta-ra-ra boom-di-ay. I'm in the soup today. *(Reads the newspaper.)* It makes no difference. No difference at all.

OLGA. If only we knew! If only we knew!

Curtain

1901

THE CHERRY ORCHARD*

A comedy in four acts

CHARACTERS

LYUBOV RANEVSKAYA, the owner of the cherry orchard
ANYA, her daughter of seventeen
VARYA, her adopted daughter of twenty-four
LEONID GAYEV, her brother
YERMOLAI LOPAKHIN, a merchant
PYOTR TROFIMOV, a student
SIMEONOV-PISHCHIK, a landowner
CHARLOTTA, a governess
SEMYON YEPIKHODOV, a clerk
DUNYASHA, a maid
FEERS, an old servant of eighty-seven
YASHA, a young servant
WAYFARER
STATIONMASTER
POST-OFFICE CLERK
GUESTS, SERVANTS

Scene: Ranevskaya's estate

* First printing 1956.

ACT ONE

A room, which is still called the nursery. One of the doors leads to Anya's room. Dawn, the sun will soon rise. It is already May, the cherry-trees are in blossom, but it is cold in the garden with the frost of early morning. The windows are closed. Dunyasha, with a candle, and Lopakhin, with a book in his hand, come in

LOPAKHIN. So the train's in, thank Heaven. What time is it?

DUNYASHA. Nearly two. *(She puts out the candle.)* It is daylight already.

LOPAKHIN. How late is the train? A couple of hours at least. *(Yawning and stretching.)* I'm certainly a fine one! To have come on purpose to meet them at the station and then to go and doze off sitting in a chair. What a shame! Why didn't you wake me?

DUNYASHA. I thought you'd gone. *(She listens.)* There! That must be them driving up.

LOPAKHIN *(listening).* No. They've got to get the luggage out and all that. *(Pause.)* I wonder what Mme Ranevskaya is like after those five years abroad. She's a splendid woman. So easy and simple in her ways. I remember when I was a youngster of fifteen my late father (he used to keep a shop here in the village then) hit me so hard in the nose it bled. We were in the yard here—I forget what we'd come about—and he had been drinking. I remember it like yesterday. Madame Ranevskaya, quite a young girl then, and oh, so slender, brought me to this very room—it was the nursery then—to wash my face. "Don't cry, little muzhik," she said, "it'll get well in time for your wedding." *(Pause.)* Little muzhik!.. My father was a muzhik, sure enough, but here am I in a white waistcoat and brown boots, a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as you might say; I'm just rich, but for all my money, come to think of it, I'm still a regular muzhik. *(Turning over the*

pages of the book.) I've been reading this book here and I didn't understand a word; I fell asleep over it. *(Pause.)*

DUNYASHA. The dogs didn't sleep at all last night, they sense their masters are coming.

LOPAKHIN. What's the matter with you, Dunyasha?

DUNYASHA. My hands are shaking. I'm going to faint.

LOPAKHIN. You are too delicate, Dunyasha, that's what's wrong with you. You dress like a young lady, and look at the way your hair's done up! That won't do. One must remember one's station.

Yepikhodov comes in with a bunch of flowers. He wears a jacket and brightly polished top boots which squeak noisily. As he comes in, he drops the flowers

YEPIKHODOV *(picking them up).* This is from the gardener; he says it's to go in the dining-room. *(He hands the bunch to Dunyasha.)*

LOPAKHIN. And bring me some kvass.

DUNYASHA. Yes, sir. *(She goes out.)*

YEPIKHODOV. There's a frost this morning, three degrees below. But the cherry-trees are all in blossom. I can't say I think much of our climate. *(Sighing.)* No, I can't. Our climate is not adapted to contribute; and I should like to add, with your permission, that only two days ago I bought myself a new pair of boots, and I venture to assure you they squeak harder than I can stand. What am I to grease them with?

LOPAKHIN. Leave me alone! I'm fed up with you.

YEPIKHODOV. Every day some misfortune happens to me. But I don't complain. No, I'm used to it, and I keep smiling, *(Dunyasha comes in and hands a glass of kvass to Lopakhin.)* I must be going. *(He knocks against a chair, which falls over.)* There you are! *(With a triumphant air.)* You see, if you'll excuse me the expression, the sort of

accident, by the way. It is simply remarkable! *(He goes out.)*

DUNYASHA. You know, Mr Lopakhin, Yepikhodov proposed to me.

LOPAKHIN. Oh!

DUNYASHA. I hardly know what to do. He is a well-behaved man all right, but sometimes, when he talks, you can't make out anything. It's all so nice and moving, but you just can't get at the meaning of it. I fancy I am rather fond of him. He loves me to distraction. He is a most unfortunate man—every day something unpleasant happens to him. So they've nicknamed him Twenty-Two Misfortunes.

LOPAKHIN *(listening).* There! I think they're coming!

DUNYASHA. They're coming! Oh, what's the matter with me? I'm cold all over.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, there they come; and no mistake. Let's go and meet them. I wonder if she'll know me. It's five years since she last saw me.

DUNYASHA *(all in a flutter).* I am going to faint! I'll drop this very minute!

Two carriages are heard driving up to the house. Lopakhin and Dunyasha go out quickly, and the stage is left empty. There is a noise in the adjoining rooms. Feers hurriedly crosses the stage, leaning on a walking-stick. He has gone to meet Ranevskaya at the station. He is wearing an old-fashioned livery and a tall hat; he mumbles something to himself but it is impossible to make out a word. The noise behind the scenes grows louder. A voice: "Here, let's go this way."

Enter Ranevskaya, Anya, Charlotta with a little dog on a chain, all in travelling clothes; Varya in an overcoat with a shawl on her head, Gayev, Simeonov-Pishchik, Lopakhin, Dunyasha carrying a parcel and an umbrella, servants with luggage; all cross the stage

ANYA. Let's go this way. Do you remember what room this is, Mamma?

RANEVSKAYA *(joyfully, through her tears).* The nursery!

VARYA. How cold it is, my hands are quite numb. *(To Ranevskaya).* Your rooms, the white room and the lavender one, are just as you left them, Mamma.

RANEVSKAYA. The nursery, my dear, beautiful nursery! Here is where I used to sleep when I was a little girl. *(Crying.)* And here I am, like a little girl again... *(Kissing Gayev and Varya and then Gayev again.)* Varya has not changed a bit, she is as like a nun as ever. And I knew Dunyasha at once. *(She kisses Dunyasha.)*

GAYEV. Your train was two hours late. What do you think of that? There's punctuality for you!

CHARLOTTA *(to Simeonov-Pishchik).* My little dog even eats nuts.

PISHCHIK *(surprised).* Fancy that!

All but Anya and Dunyasha go out

DUNYASHA. At last you're back! *(She takes off Anya's hat and overcoat.)*

ANYA. I haven't slept for four nights on the journey. I feel dreadfully cold.

DUNYASHA. It was Lent when you went away. There was snow and it was freezing. But now—look! My darling! *(Laughing and kissing her.)* I have missed you so, my joy, my precious! Oh, I must tell you something at once, I can't wait another minute.

ANYA (listlessly). What now?

DUNYASHA. Yepikhodov, the clerk, proposed to me just after Easter.

ANYA. Same old story. *(Arranging her hair.)* I've lost all my hairpins. *(She is almost staggering with fatigue.)*

DUNYASHA. I hardly know what to think of it. He loves me so!

ANYA *(looking into her bedroom, affectionately).* My room, my windows, just as if I had never gone away! I am

home again! When I wake up in the morning, I shall run out into the garden... Oh, if only I could get to sleep! I haven't had a wink since we left Paris, I was so worried.

DUNYASHA. Mr Trofimov came the day before yesterday.

ANYA *(happily).* Petya!

DUNYASHA. He's sleeping in the bath-house, he's settled in there. He's afraid he might be in the way. *(Looking at her watch.)* I'd like to go and wake him, only Miss Varya told me not to. "Don't you wake him," she said.

Varya comes in with a bunch of keys at her waist

VARYA. Dunyasha, go and get some coffee, quick. Mamma wants some coffee.

DUNYASHA. In a minute! *(She goes out.)*

VARYA. Well, thank Heaven, you've come. Here you are at home again. *(Snuggling up to Anya.)* My little darling's come back! My pretty one's come back!

ANYA. The things I've had to go through!

VARYA. I can imagine.

ANYA. I left here in Passion Week—it was so cold then; all the way Charlotta kept talking and doing conjuring tricks. What on earth made you tie her round my neck?

VARYA. You couldn't have travelled alone, darling. At seventeen!

ANYA. When we got to Paris, it was cold there—snowing. My French is shocking. Mamma lived on the fifth floor. I went up and there I found a lot of Frenchmen with her, and ladies, and an old Catholic priest with a book, and the place was full of tobacco smoke and looked so drab. I suddenly felt sorry for Mamma, oh, so sorry! I clasped her head to my breast and couldn't let it go. And then Mamma kept kissing me and crying.

VARYA *(tearfully).* Please don't, I can't bear to listen.

ANYA. She'd sold her villa at Mentone, and had

nothing left, absolutely nothing, and I hadn't a farthing either. We barely managed to get home. And Mamma won't understand! When we had dinner at the stations she always ordered the most expensive things and tipped the waiters a rouble each. So did Charlotta. And Yasha, too, must have the same as we. It was simply awful. Yasha is Mamma's manservant, you know, we've brought him back with us.

VARYA. Yes, I've seen the rascal.

ANYA. Well, now you tell me about everything. Have you paid the interest on the mortgage?

VARYA. No, how could we?

ANYA. Oh dear! Oh dear!

VARYA. The place will be sold in August.

ANYA. Dear me!

LOPAKHIN *(looking in at the door and mooing like a cow).* Moo-o. *(He goes away.)*

VARYA *(through her tears, and shaking her fist at the door).* Oh, I should like to give him one!

ANYA *(embracing Varya, softly).* Varya, has he proposed to you? *(Varya shakes her head.)* But he loves you! Why don't you come to an understanding? What are you waiting for?

VARYA. I don't think we'll get anywhere. He's so busy, he has no time for me—hardly notices me. Heaven help him, it's hard on me to have to see him. Everyone's talking about our marriage, and congratulating me, but actually there's nothing to it—it's all like a dream. *(In a different tone.)* You've got on a brooch just like a bee.

ANYA *(sadly).* Mamma bought it for me. *(Going into her room, talking light-heartedly, like a child.)* When I was in Paris I went up in a balloon!

VARYA. How glad I am you are back, my little pet! My pretty one!

Dunyasha has returned with a coffee-pot and is making coffee

VARYA *(standing by the door).* All I do all day long as I go about my work is dream of marrying you to some rich man. It would be a load off my mind. I would then go on a pilgrimage to Kiev, to Moscow... I'd keep going about from one holy place to another. What bliss!

ANYA. The birds are singing in the garden. What time is it now?

VARYA. It must be past two. Time you were in bed, my darling. *(Following Anya into her room.)* What bliss!

Yasha comes in with a shawl and a travelling bag

YASHA *(Crossing the stage, with affected politeness).* May I pass this way, please?

DUNYASHA. I shouldn't have known you, Yasha. How you've changed abroad!

YASHA. Ahem! And who may you be?

DUNYASHA. When you left here I was a little thing—this high. *(Indicating height from floor.)* I'm Dunyasha, Fedor Kozoyedov's daughter. You can't remember me!

YASHA. Ahem! What a peach! *(He looks round cautiously, then embraces her; she screams and drops a saucer. Yasha goes out hastily.)*

VARYA *(in the doorway, crossly).* What's all this?

DUNYASHA *(crying).* I've broken a saucer.

VARYA. Well, that's a sign of good luck.

Anya comes in from her room

ANYA. We ought to tell mother that Petya's here.

VARYA. I told them not to wake him.

ANYA *(thoughtfully).* It's just six years since Father died. And only a month later poor Grisha was drowned in the river, my pretty little brother—he was only seven then. It was more than poor Mamma could bear, she ran away to leave all this behind. *(Shuddering.)* How well I can

understand her, if only she knew! *(Pause.)* And Petya Trofimov might remind her. He was Grisha's tutor.

Feers comes in wearing a coat and white waistcoat

FEERS *(going over to the coffee-pot, anxiously).* Madam is going to take her coffee here. *(He puts on white gloves.)* Is the coffee ready? *(Sternly, to Dunyasha.)* You there, where's the cream?

DUNYASHA. Dear me! *(She goes out hastily.)*

FEERS *(bustling about the coffee-pot).* Why, you bungler! *(Mumbling to himself.)* So she's come back from Paris. The old master used to go to Paris, too—in a post-chaise. *(He laughs.)*

VARYA. What is it, Feers?

FEERS. Ma'm? *(Joyfully.)* My lady has come home! I've lived to see her again! Now I can die. *(He cries with joy.)*

Ranevskaya, Lopakhin, Gayev, and Simeonov-Pishchik come in. Simeonov-Pishchik wears Russian breeches and a poddyovka coat of fine cloth. Gayev, as he comes in, makes gestures as if playing billiards

RANEVSKAYA. What was the expression? Let me see. I'll pot the red—double into the middle!

GAYEV. Cannon off the red into the right-hand top! Once upon a time, Lyuba, when we were children, we used to sleep here in two little cots, and now I'm fifty-one, strange as it may seem.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, time flies.

GAYEV. What's that?

LOPAKHIN. Time flies, I say.

GAYEV. The place smells of patchouli.

ANYA. I am going to bed. Good night, Mamma. *(She kisses her mother.)*

RANEVSKAYA. My precious baby! *(Kissing her hands.)* Are you glad you're home again? I still feel strange.

ANYA. Good night, Uncle.

GAYEV *(kissing her face and hands).* God bless you! How like your mother you are! *(To Ranevskaya.)* You were just like her at her age, Lyuba.

Anya shakes hands with Lopakhin and Simeonov-Pishchik, and goes out, shutting her bedroom door behind her

RANEVSKAYA. She's quite worn out!

PISHCHIK. The journey was long enough.

VARYA *(to Lopakhin and Pishchik).* Well, gentlemen, it's almost three and time to say good-bye.

RANEVSKAYA *(laughing).* You haven't changed a bit, Varya! *(Drawing her close and kissing her.)* I'll just finish my coffee, then we'll all go. *(Feers puts a footstool under her feet.)* Thank you, my dear. I'm used to my coffee and I drink it day and night. Thank you, you dear old man. *(She kisses Feers.)*

VARYA. I'll go and see if they've brought in all the things. *(She goes out.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Is it really me sitting here? *(Laughing.)* I feel like dancing—waving my arms. *(Covering her face with her hands.)* But what if this is a dream? God knows I love my country. I love it tenderly. I couldn't look out of the window in the train, I was crying so. *(Crying.)* I must drink my coffee, though. Thank you, Feers. Thank you, you dear old man. I'm so glad to find you still alive.

FEERS. The day before yesterday.

GAYEV. He's hard of hearing.

LOPAKHIN. I've got to leave for Kharkov soon after four this morning. Such a nuisance! I wanted to have a look at you and talk to you. You're as splendid as ever.

PISHCHIK *(breathing heavily).* Handsomer than ever and dressed like a Parisian. I'm well and truly done for!

LOPAKHIN. Your brother here says I'm a cad and a money-grubber. He may say anything he likes for all I care. Only I want you to believe in me as you used to; I want

your wonderful eyes to look at me as they used to. Merciful God! My father was your father's serf, and your grandfather's serf before him, but you—you did so much for me in the old days that I've forgotten all that, and I love you as though you were my own kin—in fact, more.

RANEVSKAYA. I can't sit still, I simply can't. *(Jumping up and walking about in great agitation.)* This happiness is too much for me. You may laugh at me—I know I'm silly—my darling old bookcase! *(She kisses the bookcase.)* My darling table.

GAYEV. Nurse died while you were away.

RANEVSKAYA *(sitting down and sipping her coffee).* Yes, God rest her soul. They wrote to me about it.

GAYEV. Anastasy is dead, too. Squint-eyed Pyotr has left us and now works at the police inspector's in town. *(He takes a box of candy out of his pocket, and puts a fruit-drop in his mouth.)*

PISHCHIK. My daughter Dashenka sends her compliments.

LOPAKHIN. I'd like to tell you something pleasant and cheering. *(Glancing at his watch.)* I must be off—there's no time to talk. Anyway, I'll put it in a nutshell. You know that your cherry orchard is going to be sold to pay the mortgage; the sale is fixed for the twenty-second of August. But don't you worry, my dear lady, let nothing disturb your sleep, there's a way out of it. Here's my plan. Please, listen. Your estate is only fifteen miles from town, the railway runs close by it, and if you agree to cut up the cherry orchard and the land along the river into building lots and lease them out for summer cottages, you'll get at least twenty-five thousand roubles a year.

GAYEV. That's nonsense, if you'll excuse me!

RANEVSKAYA. I don't quite understand what you mean, Yermolai.

LOPAKHIN. You will get at least ten roubles a year for every acre from the tenants, and if you advertise the

thing at once, I'll bet whatever you like, by the autumn you won't have an inch of that land left on your hands. It'll all be snapped up. In a word, I congratulate you: you are saved. It's a first-class site, with a good deep river. Only of course it'll have to be cleared and put in order; to be exact, you'll have to pull down all the old buildings—this house, here, which is no longer fit for anything—and you'll have to cut down the old cherry orchard—

RANEVSKAYA. Cut down the cherry orchard! I'm sorry, my dear, but you don't know what you're talking about. If there is one thing that's interesting, indeed remarkable, in the whole province, it's our cherry orchard.

LOPAKHIN. There's nothing remarkable about the orchard except that it's a very big one. It only bears once in two years, and then you don't know what to do with the fruit. Nobody wants to buy it.

GAYEV. The orchard is mentioned in the Encyclopaedia.

LOPAKHIN *(glancing at his watch).* If we don't think of a way and don't decide on anything, on the twenty-second of August the cherry orchard and the whole property will be sold by auction. So, please, make up your mind. There's no other way out, I swear—none at all.

FEERS. In the old days, forty or fifty years ago, they used to dry the cherries, and soak 'em, and pickle 'em, and make jam of 'em; and the dried cherries—

GAYEV. Be quiet, Feers.

FEERS. The dried cherries used to be sent by cartfuls to Moscow and Kharkov. The money that brought in! The dried cherries were soft and juicy and sweet and good-smelling. They knew how to dry them in those days.

RANEVSKAYA. And why can't they do it now?

FEERS. They've forgotten. Nobody remembers.

PISHCHIK *(to Ranevskaya).* What's it like in Paris? Did you eat frogs there?

RANEVSKAYA. I ate crocodiles.

PISHCHIK. Fancy that!

LOPAKHIN. Until a little while ago only the gentry and peasants lived in the country; but now there are those summer-time tenants. All the towns, even the small ones, are surrounded nowadays by summer cottages. It is safe to say that in another twenty years or so the summer resident will have multiplied like anything. For the time being he does nothing but drink tea on his verandah, but he may well get down to working his bit of land, and then your cherry orchard will become rich, happy, and prosperous...

GAYEV *(angrily).* What rubbish!

Varya and Yasha come in

VARYA *(picking out a key from her bunch and noisily unlocking the old-fashioned bookcase).* There are two telegrams for you, Mamma. Here they are.

RANEVSKAYA *(tearing them up without reading them).* From Paris. I've done with Paris.

GAYEV. Do you know how old this bookcase is, Lyuba? Last week I pulled out the bottom drawer and saw a date branded inside it. It was made exactly a hundred years ago. What do you think of that, eh? We might celebrate its centenary. It's only an inanimate thing, but still it's a bookcase.

PISHCHIK *(astonished).* A hundred years! Fancy that!

GAYEV *(fingering the bookcase).* Yes, it's a wonderful thing. Dear and much respected bookcase! I greet your existence, which for more than a hundred years has served the noble ideals of justice and virtue. Your silent call for fruitful work has never relaxed these hundred years *(tearfully),* keeping up the courage of succeeding generations of our human kind and fostering faith in a brighter future and ideals of virtue and social consciousness. *(Pause.)*

LOPAKHIN. Ahem!

RANEVSKAYA. You haven't changed a bit, Leonid.

GAYEV *(slightly embarrassed).* Cannon off the red into the middle pocket!

LOPAKHIN *(looking at his watch).* Well, I must be off.

YASHA *(handing a box of medicine to Ranevskaya).* Perhaps you will take your pills now.

PISHCHIK. You oughtn't to take medicine, dear lady: it does neither good nor harm. Give that to me, my friend. *(He empties all the pills into his palm, blows on them, puts them in his mouth, and swallows them down with a draught of kvass.)* There!

RANEVSKAYA *(alarmed).* Why, you must be mad!

PISHCHIK. I've taken all the pills.

LOPAKHIN. What a gobbler! *(Everyone laughs.)*

FEERS. His honour was here during Easter week and finished off a gallon-jar of pickles. *(Mumbling something.)*

RANEVSKAYA. What's he talking about?

VARYA. He's been mumbling like that for three years now. We're used to it.

YASHA. Advancing age.

Charlotta, very thin and tightly laced, in a white frock and with a lorgnette at her waist, crosses the stage

LOPAKHIN. Excuse me, Charlotta, I've not greeted you yet. *(He attempts to kiss her hand.)*

CHARLOTTA *(drawing her hand away).* If a lady allows you to kiss her hand, you'll want to kiss her elbow next, and then her shoulder.

LOPAKHIN. No luck today. *(All laugh.)* Charlotta, show us a conjuring trick.

RANEVSKAYA. Charlotta, do show us some trick.

CHARLOTTA. No, thank you. I'm too sleepy. *(She goes out.)*

LOPAKHIN. We shall meet again in three weeks. *(Kissing Ranevskaya's hand.)* Meanwhile, good-bye. I must

be going. *(To Gayev.)* Good-bye. *(Kissing Pishchik.)* Ta-ta. *(Shaking hands with Varya, then with Feers and Yasha.)* I hate having to go. *(To Ranevskaya.)* If you make up your mind about the cottages, let me know, and I'll raise you fifty thousand roubles or so. Think it over seriously.

VARYA *(angrily).* For heaven's sake, do go!

LOPAKHIN. I'm off. *(He goes out.)*

GAYEV. Lout! I beg pardon, though. Varya's going to marry him; he's Varya's young man.

VARYA. You talk too much, Uncle.

RANEVSKAYA. Why, Varya, I shall be very glad. He's a nice man.

PISHCHIK. A most worthy man, sure enough. My Dashenka also says—oh, she says lots of things. *(He snores but wakes up at once.)* By the by, dear lady, could you lend me 240 roubles? I've got to pay the interest on my mortgage tomorrow.

VARYA *(alarmed).* Oh no, we can't!

RANEVSKAYA. I really haven't any money.

PISHCHIK. I'll find it somewhere. *(Laughing).* I never lose hope. Last time I said to myself I was really done for, a ruined man, when all of a sudden a railway ran over my land and they paid me compensation. And so something may turn up again—tomorrow if not today. Dashenka may win two hundred thousand: she's got a lottery ticket.

RANEVSKAYA. The coffee's finished. Let's go to bed.

FEERS *(brushing Gayev, reprovingly).* You've put on the wrong trousers again. Whatever am I to do with you?

VARYA *(softly).* Anya's asleep. *(She gently opens the window.)* The sun's up already; it isn't cold now. Look, Mamma, how lovely the trees are. Heavens! And the air! The starlings are singing!

GAYEV *(opening another window).* The orchard is all white. You've not forgotten it, have you, Lyuba? This long

avenue running straight on, like a taut belt, between the trees? It shines like silver on moonlit nights. Do you remember?

RANEVSKAYA *(looking out of the window).* Oh, my childhood, my pure and happy childhood! I used to sleep in this nursery. I used to look out from here into the garden. Happiness awoke with me every morning, and the orchard was just the same, nothing has changed. *(Laughing with joy.)* It is all white, all white! Oh, my orchard! After the dark and stormy autumn and the cold winter you are young again and full of happiness, and the angels of heaven have never left you. If only I could shake off the stone that weighs on my heart! If only I could forget my past!

GAYEV. And then, strange as it may seem, this orchard will be sold to pay our debts.

RANEVSKAYA. Look! There's Mamma walking ... in a white frock! *(Laughing with joy.)* It's she!

GAYEV. Where?

VARYA. Please, Mother.

RANEVSKAYA. There's no one there, I only fancied it. On the right, where the path turns down to the arbour, there's a bent cherry-tree. It looks like a woman.

Trofimov, in a shabby student uniform and spectacles, comes in

What a wonderful orchard! White masses of blossom and a blue sky.

TROFIMOV. Madame! *(She looks round at him.)* I only want to say "How do you do" and then I'll go away. *(Kissing her hand warmly.)* I was told to wait till the morning, but I just couldn't.

Ranevskaya looks at him in perplexity

VARYA *(through her tears).* This is Pyotr Trofimov.

TROFIMOV. Pyotr Trofimov; I was your Grisha's tutor. Can I have changed so much?

Ranevskaya embraces him and cries softly

GAYEV *(embarrassed).* There, there now, Lyuba!

VARYA *(crying).* I told you, Petya, to wait till the morning.

RANEVSKAYA. My little Grisha! My little boy! Grisha ... my son...

VARYA. It can't be helped, Mamma, it was God's will.

TROFIMOV *(gently, through his tears).* There, there!

RANEVSKAYA *(crying softly).* He was drowned. My little boy was drowned. Why? Oh, why, my dear? *(More quietly.)* Anya's asleep in there, and I am talking so loudly, and making a noise... But tell me, Pyotr, why do you look so bad? Why have you aged so?

TROFIMOV. A peasant woman on the train called me a moth-eaten gentleman.

RANEVSKAYA. You were quite a boy then, a dear little student, and now your hair's thin and you wear spectacles. Are you really a student still? *(Going towards the door.)*

TROFIMOV. Yes, I suppose I shall be a perpetual student.

RANEVSKAYA *(kissing her brother and then Varya).* Well, go to bed. You've aged too, Leonid.

PISHCHIK *(following her).* Time for bed. Oh, oh, my gout! I'll stay the night here. Don't forget, my angel, tomorrow morning—240 roubles.

GAYEV. He keeps harping on the same string.

PISHCHIK. Two hundred and forty roubles, to pay the interest on my mortgage.

RANEVSKAYA. I have no money, my friend.

PISHCHIK. I'll pay you back, dear lady. It's a trifling sum, really.

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, well, Leonid will give it to you. Let him have it, Leonid.

GAYEV. Let him have it? He'll have a long wait.

RANEVSKAYA. It can't be helped, he needs it. He'll pay it back.

Ranevskaya, Trofimov, Pishchik and Feers go out

GAYEV. My sister hasn't got out of her old habit of flinging away her money. *(To Yasha.)* Step back, my lad. You smell of chicken.

YASHA *(with a grin).* You're just the same as ever, sir!

GAYEV. What's that? *(To Varya.)* What did he say?

VARYA *(to Yasha).* Your mother's come up from the village. She's been waiting for you since yesterday in the servants' hall. She wants to see you.

YASHA. I shall bother!

VARYA. Shame on you!

YASHA. Well, what do I want with her? Couldn't she have waited till tomorrow? *(He goes out.)*

VARYA. Mamma is just like she used to be, she hasn't changed a bit. If she had her way, she'd give away everything she has.

GAYEV. Yes. *(Pause.)* If very many cures are suggested for an illness, that means it is incurable. I keep thinking and racking my brains. I know of very many cures, which means that there aren't really any. How nice it would be to get a legacy or marry Anya off to a rich man. Or I might go to Yaroslavl and try my luck with my old aunt the Countess. She is very rich, you know.

VARYA *(crying).* If only God would help us!

GAYEV. Stop blubbering. Aunt's very rich, of course, but she doesn't care for us. Above all because Lyuba married a solicitor and not a nobleman.

Anya appears in the doorway

She married a man who was not a nobleman and it's no good pretending that she has led a virtuous life. She's a dear, kind, charming creature, and I love her very much, but no matter what extenuating circumstances you think of,

there's no denying that she's a sinful woman. You can see that in her every gesture.

VARYA *(whispering).* Anya is standing in the doorway.

GAYEV. What's that? *(Pause.)* It's very odd, something's got into my right eye. I can't see well any more. Last Thursday when I was down at the District Court—

Anya comes in

VARYA. Why aren't you in bed, Anya?

ANYA. I can't sleep. It's no good trying.

GAYEV. My little pet! *(Kissing Anya's hands and face.)* My little girl! *(Crying.)* You're not my niece, you're my angel, you're everything to me. Believe me ... do!

ANYA. I do believe you, Uncle. Everybody likes and respects you; but dear, dear Uncle, you oughtn't to talk—you'd better keep quiet. What were you saying just now about Mamma, your own sister? What made you say that?

GAYEV. Yes, yes. *(Covering his face with her hand.)* You're quite right, it really was awful of me! Good Lord! Save me! And a little while ago I made a speech to the bookcase. So stupid of me! As soon as I had done it, I knew it was stupid.

VARYA. Yes, that's true, Uncle. You ought to keep quiet. Don't talk, that's all.

ANYA. You would feel better if you only held your tongue.

GAYEV. I will! *(Kissing Anya's and Varya's hands.)* I'll be dumb. Only one thing—it's about business. Last Thursday, when I was down at the District Court, there was a lot of people there and we got to talking about this and that, one thing and another, and it seems I could arrange a loan on a promissory note to pay the interest into the bank.

VARYA. If only Heaven would help us!

GAYEV. I'll go there on Tuesday and talk it over again. *(To Varya.)* Stop blubbering! *(To Anya.)* Your mother will have a talk with Lopakhin. Of course he won't refuse her. And as soon as you're rested you must go and see your grandmother, the Countess, in Yaroslavl. So we'll set to work in three directions at once, and the trick is done. We'll manage to pay the interest, I'm certain of it. *(He puts a fruit-drop in his mouth.)* I swear on my honour, or whatever you will, the property shan't be sold. *(Excitedly.)* I swear it by my happiness! Here's my hand on it, call me a mean, dishonest man if I let it go to auction. I swear it with all my heart!

ANYA *(calm again and happy).* What a dear you are, Uncle, and how clever! *(She embraces him.)* Now I'm no longer worried. I feel easy again! I'm happy!

Feers comes in

FEERS *(reproachfully).* Have you no fear of God, sir? When are you going to bed?

GAYEV. In a moment. You get along, Feers. I'll manage without you and undress myself. Come, children, bye-bye! Details tomorrow, but now let's go to bed. *(Kissing Anya and Varya.)* I'm a man of the 'eighties. People frown on the 'eighties, but I may say I've had to smart for my convictions in my time. It's not for nothing that the peasants love me. You have to know the peasants; you have to know how—

ANYA. There you go again, Uncle!

VARYA. You'd better be quiet, Uncle dear.

FEERS *(angrily).* Sir!

GAYEV. I'm coming. Now go to bed. Off two cushions into the middle pocket! *(He goes with Feers shuffling after him.)*

ANYA. Now my mind's at rest. I don't want to go to Yaroslavl: I don't like grandmamma; but my mind's at rest, thanks to Uncle. *(She sits down.)*

VARYA. Time for bed. I'm off. While you were away there was a scandal here. You know that nobody lives in the old servants' quarters except old people—Yefim, Polya, Yevstignei and Karp. Well, they took to having in all sorts of stray people to spend the night. I didn't say a word. But all at once I heard they had spread a rumour that I had fed them on nothing but peas. Out of stinginess, they said. It was all Yevstignei's doing. "Very well," I said to myself, "since that's how things are I'll teach you." I sent for Yevstignei. *(Yawning.)* He comes. "Now then, Yevstignei," I said. "You old fool, how could you—" *(Looking at Anya.)* Anya! *(Pause.)* She's asleep. *(Taking Anya's arm.)* Let's go to bed. Come along. *(Leading her away.)* My little one has fallen asleep! Come along!

They go towards Anya's room. In the distance beyond the orchard a shepherd is heard playing his pipe. Trofimov crosses the stage and, seeing Varya and Anya, stops

Sh! She's asleep. Come, my love.

ANYA *(drowsily).* I'm so tired! Those bells! Uncle, dear! Mamma! Uncle!

VARYA. Come, my love! Come along.

Varya and Anya go out to Anya's room

TROFIMOV *(tenderly).* My sunshine! My spring!

Curtain

ACT TWO

The open country; an old chapel, long abandoned and ramshackle. Near it a well; big slabs, apparently old tombstones, and an old bench. Road to the estate beyond. On one side rise dark poplars. Beyond them begins the cherry orchard. In the distance a row of telegraph poles, and far away on the horizon, the dim outlines of a big town, only visible in fine, clear weather. It is near sunset.

Charlotta, Yasha, and Dunyasha sit on the bench. Yepikhodov stands by them and plays a guitar. All seem to be plunged in thought. Charlotta wears an old peaked cap. She has taken a shotgun off her shoulder and is adjusting the buckle of the strap

CHARLOTTA *(thoughtfully).* I have no proper passport. I don't know how old I am. I fancy I am still young. When I was a little girl my father and mother used to go from one country fair to another, acting in sideshows, and very good ones too. I used to do the *salto mortale* and all sorts of tricks. When Papa and Mamma died, an old German lady adopted me and brought me up. That was alright. When I grew up I became a governess. But I have no idea who I am or where I come from. Who my parents were I don't know—very likely they weren't married at all. *(She takes a cucumber from her pocket and munches at it.)* I don't know a thing. *(Pause.)* I long to talk so, and there's no one to talk to, no friends or relatives.

YEPIKHODOV *(playing the guitar and singing).*

"What is the noisy world to me?
Oh, what are friends and foes?.."
How sweet it is to play a mandolin!

DUNYASHA. That's a guitar, not a mandolin. *(She looks at herself in a hand-glass and powders her face.)*

YEPIKHODOV. To one mad with love it is a mandolin. *(Singing.)*

"Oh, that my heart were cheered.
By the warmth of requited love."

Yasha joins in

CHARLOTTA. How shockingly these people sing! Fie! Like jackals howling!

DUNYASHA *(to Yasha).* What happiness it must be to visit foreign lands!

YASHA. Yes, I quite agree with you. *(He yawns and lights a cigar.)*

YEPIKHODOV. That goes without saying. Everything abroad has attained a full complexion.

YASHA. It certainly has.

YEPIKHODOV. I am a well-read man, I have studied various remarkable books, but I cannot make out the trend of my preferences. I don't know whether I should live or, speaking bluntly, shoot myself. But I always carry a revolver in my pocket, just in case. Here it is. *(Shows the revolver.)*

CHARLOTTA. That's done. I'll be going now. *(Slinging the shotgun over her shoulder.)* You're a clever fellow, Yepikhodov, and very alarming. Women must fall madly in love with you. Brrr! *(Going.)* These clever people are all so stupid—there's no one to talk to. I am always alone, always alone—I have no friends or relatives, and nobody can tell who I am, or why I live. *(She walks out slowly.)*

YEPIKHODOV. Strictly speaking, without touching upon other matters, I must protest, by the way, that destiny tosses me about as a tempest might a small ship. If I labour under a misapprehension, then why is it that I woke up this morning and saw sitting on my chest a spider of fearful size—this big? *(Indicating with both hands.)* And if I go to take a draught of kvass, I am sure to find in it something of the most unseemly character, in the nature of a cockroach. *(Pause.)* Have you read Buckle? *(Pause; to Dunyasha.)* I should like to trouble you for a moment.

DUNYASHA. Speak up.

YEPIKHODOV. I should prefer to have the talk in private. *(He draws a sigh.)*

DUNYASHA *(embarrassed).* Very well, only first please fetch me my cloak. It's by the wardrobe. It's rather damp here.

YEPIKHODOV. Certainly, I'll fetch it. Now I know what I should do with my revolver. *(He takes his guitar and goes out, playing.)*

YASHA. Twenty-Two Misfortunes! Between you and me, he's a fool. *(Yawning.)*

DUNYASHA. The Lord keep him from shooting himself. *(Pause.)* I've grown so nervous, I am always in a twitter. I was quite a little girl when they took me on here as a maid, and now I've quite grown out of common ways, and my hands are as white as a lady's. I'm so sensitive and delicate, I am afraid of everything. I'm always frightened. And if you deceive me, Yasha, I don't know what will happen to my nerves.

YASHA *(kissing her).* You're a peach! However, a girl must never forget herself. What I hate is girls who are flighty.

DUNYASHA. I'm dreadfully in love with you. You're so educated—you can talk about anything! *(Pause.)*

YASHA *(yawning).* Yes... The way I see it is this: if a girl falls in love with anybody, she must be immoral. *(Pause.)* How pleasant it is to smoke one's cigar in the open air. *(Listening.)* Someone's coming. It's the gentlefolk. *(Dunyasha embraces him impulsively.)* Go towards the house as if you'd just been for a bathe. Go by this path or else when they meet you they'll think I've been out with you. I can't stand that sort of thing.

DUNYASHA *(clearing her throat).* Your cigar has given me a headache. *(She goes out.)*

Yasha remains sitting by the chapel. Ranevskaya, Gayev, and Lopakhin come in

LOPAKHIN. You must make up your mind once and for all. Time waits for no man. The question is perfectly simple. Are you going to lease the land for cottages or not? Answer in one word: yes or no? Only one word!

RANEVSKAYA. Who's smoking horrible cigars here? *(She sits down.)*

GAYEV. Now they've built the railway, it's made things very convenient. *(Sitting down.)* We've been over

and lunched in town. Cannon off the white! I'd like to go in and have a game.

RANEVSKAYA. There's no hurry.

LOPAKHIN. Only one word—yes or no! *(Entreatingly.)* Come, give me the answer!

GAYEV *(yawning).* What's that?

RANEVSKAYA *(looking into her purse).* I had a lot of money yesterday but there's hardly any left now. Poor Varya tries to save money by feeding us all on milk soup; the old people in the kitchen get nothing but peas, and yet here I am squandering money. *(Dropping her purse and scattering gold coins; vexed.)* There, I've dropped it all!

YASHA. Allow me, I'll pick it up. *(Collecting the coins.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, please do, Yasha! Whatever made me go to town for lunch? I hate your horrid restaurant with its music and its table-cloths all smelling of soap. Why do you drink so much, Leonid? Why do you eat so much? Why do you talk so much? You talked too much at the restaurant again, and all so out of place, about the 'seventies, and the decadents. And to whom? Fancy talking about decadents to the waiters!

LOPAKHIN. You're right.

GAYEV (with a gesture). I'm incorrigible, that's plain. *(Irritably to Yasha.)* Must you keep getting in my way?

YASHA *(laughing).* I can't hear your voice without laughing.

GAYEV *(to Ranevskaya.)* Either he or I!

RANEVSKAYA. Go away, Yasha; run along.

YASHA *(handing Ranevskaya her purse).* Directly. *(Keeping back his laughter with an effort.)* This very minute. *(He goes out.)*

LOPAKHIN. Deriganov, the millionaire, wants to buy your estate. They say he's coming to the auction himself.

RANEVSKAYA. Where did you hear that?

LOPAKHIN. I was told so in town.

GAYEV. Our aunt in Yaroslavl has promised to send something; but I don't know when, or how much.

LOPAKHIN. How much will she send? A hundred thousand? Two hundred?

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, come. Ten or fifteen thousand at the most. We should be thankful for that.

LOPAKHIN. Excuse me, but in all my life I never met anybody so flippant as you two, so crazy and unbusiness-like! I tell you your property is going to be sold, and you don't seem to understand it.

RANEVSKAYA. Well, what are we to do? Tell us what you want us to do.

LOPAKHIN. Don't I tell you every day? Every day I say the same thing over and over again. You must lease off the cherry orchard and the rest of the estate for summer cottages; you must do it at once, this very moment—the auction will be on you in two shakes! Try and understand. Once you make up your mind about the cottages, you get all the money you want, and you're saved.

RANEVSKAYA. Summer cottages and summer residents, it's all so vulgar, if you don't mind my saying it.

GAYEV. I quite agree with you.

LOPAKHIN. I shall either weep, or scream, or have a fit. I can't stand it! You'll be my undoing. *(To Gayev.)* You're a sissy!

GAYEV. What's that?

LOPAKHIN. You're a sissy! *(He starts to go.)*

RANEVSKAYA *(frightened).* Oh, don't go. Please stay, there's a dear! Perhaps we can think of some way.

LOPAKHIN. What's there to think of!

RANEVSKAYA. Don't go, please; I entreat you. I feel more cheerful when you're here. *(Pause.)* I keep expecting something terrible to happen, as if the house were going to tumble down about our ears.

GAYEV *(in deep abstraction).* Cannon off the white. Double into the middle pocket.

RANEVSKAYA. We have been great sinners!

LOPAKHIN. You! What sins could you have committed?

GAYEV *(putting a fruit-drop in his mouth).* They say I've eaten up my fortune in sugar candy. *(Laughing.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, the sins that I have committed! I've always squandered money recklessly, like a crazy woman; I married a man who made nothing but debts. My husband died of champagne—he was a fearful drinker. Then, in an unlucky hour, I fell in love and had an affair with another man: and just then—that was my first punishment—a cruel blow ... here, in this very river ... my little boy was drowned; and I went abroad never to come back, never to see this river again. I shut my eyes and fled as in a daze, and that man pursued me, pitilessly, cruelly. I bought a villa at Mentone, because he fell ill there, and for three years I had no rest day or night. The sick man tormented me, his illness wore me out. Then, last year, when my villa was sold to pay my debts, I went off to Paris, and there he robbed me of everything, left me for another woman, and I tried to take poison. It was all so stupid, so humiliating! And suddenly I longed to be back in Russia, in my own country, with my little girl... *(Wiping away her tears.)* Lord, be merciful to me. Forgive my sins! Do not punish me any more! *(She takes a telegram from her pocket.)* I got this today from Paris. He asks my forgiveness, begs me to come back. *(Tearing up the telegram.)* Isn't that music I hear! *(She listens.)*

GAYEV. That's our famous Jewish orchestra. You remember? Four fiddles, a flute, and a double bass.

RANEVSKAYA. Does it still exist? We ought to send for them some time and have a dance.

LOPAKHIN *(listening).* I don't hear anything. *(Singing softly.)*

"The Germans for a fee will turn
A Russ into a Frenchman."

(Laughing.) I saw a very funny piece at the theatre last night; awfully funny!

RANEVSKAYA. It probably wasn't at all funny. You oughtn't to see plays: you ought to try to see yourselves—to see what a dull life you lead, and how much you talk.

LOPAKHIN. That's true. I must say it in all fairness—we live like fools. *(Pause.)* My father was a muzhik, an idiot who understood nothing and taught me nothing. All he did was to beat me, when he was drunk, with a stick. As a matter of fact I'm just as big a dolt and idiot as he was. I never studied properly, my handwriting's awful; I write so poorly it's shameful.

RANEVSKAYA. You ought to get married, my dear man.

LOPAKHIN. Yes, that's true.

RANEVSKAYA. Why not marry our Varya? She's a nice girl.

LOPAKHIN. Yes.

RANEVSKAYA. She's of common stock; she works all day, and what's more, she loves you. And you've been fond of her for a long time.

LOPAKHIN. Well, why not? I'm quite willing. She's a very nice girl. *(Pause.)*

GAYEV. I've been offered a place in a bank. Six thousand roubles a year. Have you heard about it?

RANEVSKAYA. You in a bank! Stay where you are.

Feers comes in carrying an overcoat

FEERS *(to Gayev).* Put it on, sir, it's getting damp.

GAYEV *(putting on the coat).* What a nuisance you are, Feers!

FEERS. That won't do, sir—you went off and never told me. *(Examining his clothes.)*

RANEVSKAYA. How old you've got, Feers!

FEERS. I beg your pardon?

LOPAKHIN. She says how old you've got!

FEERS. I've been alive a long time. When they found me a wife, your father wasn't born yet. *(He laughs.)* And when they freed the serfs, I was already chief valet. But I wouldn't have any freedom then; I stayed with the master. *(Pause.)* I remember how happy everybody was, but why they were happy they didn't know.

LOPAKHIN. Those were good times. At least there was flogging then.

FEERS *(mishearing him).* Why, of course! The peasants minded the masters, and the masters minded the peasants, but now it's all higgledy-piggledy, you can't make head or tail of it.

GAYEV. Don't talk, Feers. I must go to town again tomorrow. I've been promised an introduction to a general who can lend money on a promissory note.

LOPAKHIN. It'll be no good. You won't even be able to pay the interest, take my word for that.

RANEVSKAYA *(to Lopakhin).* That's all his nonsense. There's no such general at all.

Trofimov, Anya, and Varya come in

GAYEV. Here come our girls.

ANYA. Here's Mamma.

RANEVSKAYA *(tenderly).* Come along, come along, my little ones. *(Embracing Anya and Varya.)* If only you knew how much I love you both! Sit down by my side, that's it. *(Everybody sits down.)*

LOPAKHIN. The perpetual student's always with the girls.

TROFIMOV. Mind your own business.

LOPAKHIN. He's nearly fifty and still a student.

TROFIMOV. Stop your idiotic jokes.

LOPAKHIN. What are you losing your temper for?

TROFIMOV. Why can't you leave me alone?

LOPAKHIN *(laughing).* I should like to know what you think of me.

TROFIMOV. This is what I think of you, Yermolai. You're a rich man, you'll soon be a millionaire. Just as, for the conversion of matter, a beast of prey is necessary which devours everything that comes its way, so you are necessary too.

All laugh

VARYA. Better tell us something about the planets, Petya.

RANEVSKAYA. No, let's pick up the talk we were having yesterday.

TROFIMOV. What about?

GAYEV. About pride.

TROFIMOV. We had a long talk yesterday, but it didn't get us anywhere. Pride, as you use the word, has an element of the mystical. You may be right from your own point of view, but if we look at it simply, what room is there for pride? Is there any sense in it, when man is so poorly constructed in terms of physiology, when the vast majority of us are so gross and stupid and profoundly unhappy? We must give up admiring ourselves. The only thing to do is to work.

GAYEV. We shall die all the same.

TROFIMOV. Who knows? And what does it mean, to die? Perhaps man has a hundred senses, and when he dies only the five senses that we know perish with him, and the other ninety-five remain alive.

RANEVSKAYA. How clever you are, Petya.

LOPAKHIN *(ironically).* Isn't he now!

TROFIMOV. Mankind marches forward, perfecting itself. All that we find unattainable now will some day be near and clear; but we must work, we must do our utmost to help those who seek after truth. At present very few work in Russia. The vast majority of the educated people that I know seek after nothing, do nothing, and are as yet

incapable of work. They call themselves the "intelligentsia", but they speak rudely to the servants, they treat the peasants like animals, learn nothing, read nothing serious, do absolutely nothing, only talk about science, and know little or nothing about art. They are all serious, and all wear solemn faces; they discuss important subjects and air their theories; but meanwhile workers eat abominably and sleep in filth without pillows. There are as many as forty of them sleeping in one room and bugs everywhere, and the stench and damp and moral impurity. It's plain that all our clever talk is only meant to distract our attention and other people's. Show me where those kindergartens are that they're always talking so much about, or those reading-rooms. They are only things people write about in novels—they don't really exist at all. There's nothing but dirt, vulgarity, and Asiatic ways. I am afraid of serious faces, I dislike them. I am afraid of serious conversations. We had better hold our tongues.

LOPAKHIN. You know, I get up soon after four every morning, I work from morning till night; I am always handling my own money or other people's and I see the sort of men there are about me. You have only to begin doing something to see how few honest and decent people there are. Sometimes, as I lie awake at night, I say to myself: "O Lord, you have given us mighty forests, boundless fields, the widest horizons, and we who live here ought really to be giants..."

RANEVSKAYA. You want giants! They are all very well in fairy stories, but in real life they are rather alarming. *(Yepikhodov passes at the back of the scene, playing his guitar.) (Pensively.)* There goes Yepikhodov.

ANYA *(pensively).* There goes Yepikhodov.

GAYEV. The sun has set.

TROFIMOV. Yes.

GAYEV *(as if reciting, not loud).* O Nature, wonderful Nature, you glow with eternal light; beautiful and indiffer-

ent, you whom we call our Mother, uniting in yourself both life and death, you animate and you destroy...

VARYA *(entreatingly).* Uncle!

ANYA. You're at it again, Uncle!

TROFIMOV. You'd much better he cannoning off the red.

GAYEV. I'll hold my tongue! I will!

All sit plunged in thought. Perfect silence, broken only by the mumblings of old Feers. Suddenly a distant sound is heard as if from the sky, the sound of a string snapping—dying away, melancholy

RANEVSKAYA. What was that?

LOPAKHIN. I don't know. Probably a lifting-tub's given way somewhere far in the mines. Only it must be a long way off.

GAYEV. Perhaps it's some sort of bird—a heron, or something.

TROFIMOV. Or an owl.

RANEVSKAYA *(shuddering).* There's something uncanny about it. *(Pause.)*

FEERS. The same thing happened before the great misfortune; the owl screeched and the samovar kept humming.

GAYEV. What great misfortune?

FEERS. The Liberation. *(Pause.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Come, let us all go in: it's getting late. *(To Anya.)* You've tears in your eyes. What is it, little one? *(Embracing her.)*

ANYA. Nothing, Mamma, I'm all right.

TROFIMOV. There's someone coming.

A wayfarer appears in a shabby white peaked cap and overcoat. He is slightly drunk

WAYFARER. Excuse me, but can I get to the station this way?

GAYEV. Yes. Take this road.

WAYFARER. I am uncommonly obliged to you, sir. *(Clearing his throat.)* Lovely weather we're having. *(He recites.)* "Brother, my suffering brother... Come to the Volga—who is it that groans—" *(To Varya.)* Mademoiselle, please spare some kopeks for a hungry fellow countryman.

Varya cries out in alarm

LOPAKHIN *(angrily).* There's a limit to even the most outrageous behaviour!

RANEVSKAYA *(flustered).* Here, take this. *(Fumbling in her purse.)* I haven't any silver... Never mind, here is a gold rouble.

WAYFARER. I am uncommonly obliged to you, madam. *(He goes off.)*

Laughter

VARYA *(frightened).* I'd better go! I'm going! Oh, Mamma, there's nothing for the servants to eat at home, and you've gone and given that man a rouble.

RANEVSKAYA. What's to be done with your stupid old mother? I'll turn over to you everything I have when we get home. Yermolai, lend me some more money.

LOPAKHIN. Certainly.

RANEVSKAYA. Come along, everyone; it's time to turn in. We've settled all about your marriage, Varya. Congratulations.

VARYA *(through her tears).* This is no joking matter, Mamma.

LOPAKHIN. Ophelia, get thee to a nunnery!

GAYEV. My hands are all trembling; it's ages since I played a game of billiards.

LOPAKHIN. Ophelia, nymph, in thine orisons be all my sins remember'd.

RANEVSKAYA. Come along. It's nearly supper-time.

VARYA. How he frightened me! My heart's still thumping.

LOPAKHIN. Allow me to remind you, ladies and gentlemen, that the cherry orchard is to be sold on the twenty-second of August. Bear that in mind, bear that in mind!

All go off except Trofimov and Anya

ANYA *(laughing).* Many thanks to that tramp for frightening Varya; at last we are alone.

TROFIMOV. Varya's afraid we may fall in love with each other, so she tries not to leave us alone. With her narrow mind she cannot understand that we are above love. To avoid everything petty, everything illusory, everything that prevents us from being free and happy, that is the whole meaning and purpose of our life. Forward! We march on irresistibly towards that bright star that shines far ahead! Forward! Don't fall behind, friends.

ANYA *(clasping her hands).* How beautifully you speak! *(Pause.)* Isn't it enchanting here today?

TROFIMOV. Yes, it's wonderful weather.

ANYA. What have you done to me, Petya? Why is it that I no longer love the cherry orchard as I did? I used to love it so dearly; I thought there was no place on earth like our garden.

TROFIMOV. All Russia is our garden. The earth is great and beautiful; there are many wonderful places in it. *(Pause.)* Just think, Anya, your grandfather, your great-grandfather and all your ancestors were serf-owners, owners of living souls. Do not human faces look out at you from every tree in the orchard, from every leaf and trunk? Can't you hear their voices?.. Owning people—why, it has transformed you all, both your ancestors and yourselves, so that neither you nor your mother nor your uncle realise that you are living on credit, at the expense of those whom you never admit into your house. Yes, we are at least two hundred years behind the times. We have achieved nothing

at all as yet; we have no attitude towards the past; we only philosophise, complain of boredom, or drink vodka. It is so obvious that to live in the present, we must first redeem the past, and have done with it; and it is only by suffering that we can redeem it, by strenuous, unremitting toil. Understand that, Anya.

ANYA. The house we live in has long since ceased to be our own, and I shall go away, I give you my word.

TROFIMOV. If you have the household keys, throw them in the well and away. Be as free as the wind.

ANYA *(enthusiastically).* How beautifully you put it!

TROFIMOV. Believe me, Anya, believe me! I'm not thirty yet; I am still young, still a student, but what I have gone through! As soon as winter comes I am hungry, ill, worried, poor as a beggar. Fate has tossed me hither and thither; I have been everywhere, everywhere. And yet every minute, day and night, my soul has been full of unaccountable anticipations. I feel the approach of happiness. Anya—I almost see it coming.

ANYA *(pensively).* The moon is rising.

Yepikhodov is heard still playing the same sad tune on his guitar. The moon rises. Somewhere beyond the poplar-trees Varya is heard calling for Anya: "Anya, where are you?"

TROFIMOV. Yes, the moon is rising. *(Pause.)* There it is, happiness, here it comes, nearer and nearer—I can hear the sound of its footsteps. And if we do not live to see it, if we never know it, what does it matter! Others will see it.

VARYA *(off-stage).* Anya! Where are you?

TROFIMOV. There's that Varya again! *(Angrily.)* What a nuisance.

ANYA. Never mind. Let's go down to the river. It's lovely there.

TROFIMOV. Come on! *(They go.)*

VARYA *(off-stage).* Anya! Anya!

Curtain

ACT THREE

A sitting-room separated by an arch from a big drawing-room behind. Chandelier lighted. The Jewish band mentioned in Act Two is heard playing in the ante-room. Evening. In the drawing-room they are dancing the grand rond. Simeonov-Pishchik is heard crying: *"Promenade à une paire!"* The dancers enter the sitting-room in pairs, first Pishchik and Charlotta, then Trofimov and Ranevskaya; the third pair is Anya and the post-office clerk, the fourth Varya and the stationmaster, and so on. Varya is crying softly and wiping away her tears as she dances. The last pair is Dunyasha and her partner. They cross the sitting-room.

PISHCHIK. *Grand rond, balancez! Les cavaliers à genoux et remerciez vos dames!*

Feers in evening dress brings in seltzer water on a tray. Pishchik and Trofimov come into the sitting-room

PISHCHIK. I am a full-blooded man; I've had two strokes already. It's hard work dancing, but, as the saying goes: "If you run with the pack, bark or no, but wag your tail." I'm as strong as a horse. My old father, who was fond of his joke, God rest his soul, used to say about our family tree that the ancient stock of the Simeonov-Pishchiks was descended from that very horse that Caligula made a senator... *(Sitting.)* But the worst of it is, I've got no money. A hungry dog believes in nothing but meat. *(He snores but wakes up at once.)* Just like me. I can think of nothing but money.

TROFIMOV. There really is something horse-like about your appearance.

PISHCHIK. Well, a horse is a fine creature. You can sell it.

A sound of billiards being played in the adjoining room. Varya appears in the drawing-room under the arch

TROFIMOV *(teasing her).* Madame Lopakhina! Madame Lopakhina!

VARYA *(angrily).* Moth-eaten gentleman!

TROFIMOV. Yes, I'm a moth-eaten gentleman, and I'm proud of it.

VARYA *(bitterly).* We've hired the band, but where's the money to pay for it? *(She goes out.)*

TROFIMOV *(to Pishchik).* If the energy you have spent during your lifetime in looking for money to pay your interest had been diverted to some other purpose, you might have turned the world upside down.

PISHCHIK. Nietzsche, the philosopher, a very great and celebrated man ... a man of enormous intellect, says in his works that it's quite right to forge banknotes.

TROFIMOV. Have you read Nietzsche?

PISHCHIK. Well, Dashenka told me. And I'm in such a hole, I'm ready to forge 'em. I've got to pay 310 roubles the day after tomorrow... I've got 130 already. *(Feeling his pockets, alarmed.)* My money's gone! I've lost it! *(Tearfully.)* Where's my money? *(Joyfully.)* Here it is, inside the lining. It's made me hot all over.

Ranevskaya and Charlotta come in

RANEVSKAYA (humming the *Lezghinka* *). Why is Leonid so long? What can he be doing in town? *(To Dunyasha.)* Dunyasha, ask the musicians if they'll have some tea.

TROFIMOV. The sale did not take place, most likely.

RANEVSKAYA. This was no time to invite the musicians, and we shouldn't have arranged this dance. Well, it can't be helped. *(She sits down and hums to herself.)*

CHARLOTTA *(giving Pishchik a pack of cards).* Here's a pack of cards. Think of any card you like.

PISHCHIK. I've thought of one.

CHARLOTTA. Now shuffle the pack. That's right.

* A Caucasian dance.

Give it to me, oh, most worthy Mr Pishchik. Ein, zwei, drei! Now look—it's in your pocket.

PISHCHIK *(taking a card from his pocket).* The Eight of Spades! You're perfectly right. *(Astonished.)* Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA *(holding the pack on her palm. To Trofimov).* Tell me quickly, what's the top card?

TROFIMOV. Well, say the Queen of Spades.

CHARLOTTA. Right! *(To Pishchik)* Now then, what's the top card?

PISHCHIK. Ace of Hearts.

CHARLOTTA. Right! *(She claps her hands, the pack of cards disappears.)* Ah! What lovely weather it is today. *(A mysterious female voice, which seems coming from under the floor, answers her: "Oh, yes, simply magnificent, madam.")* You are my beautiful ideal.

THE VOICE. I think you very beautiful, too, madam.

STATIONMASTER *(applauding).* Bravo, Miss Ventriloquist!

PISHCHIK *(astonished).* Fancy that! Bewitching Charlotta, I'm head over ears in love with you.

CHARLOTTA. In love! *(Shrugging her shoulders.)* Are you capable of love? Guter Mensch, aber schlechter Musikant!

TROFIMOV *(slapping Pishchik on the shoulder).* You old horse!

CHARLOTTA. Now attention, please; one more trick. *(Taking a shawl from a chair.)* Now here's a shawl, and a very pretty shawl: I'm going to sell this very pretty shawl. *(Shaking it.)* Who'll buy? Who'll buy?

PISHCHIK *(astonished).* Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA. Ein, zwei, drei! *(She lifts the shawl quickly and reveals Anya, who drops a curtsy, runs to her mother, embraces her, then runs into the drawing-room amid general enthusiasm.)*

RANEVSKAYA *(applauding).* Bravo! Bravo!

CHARLOTTA. Once more. Ein, zwei, drei! *(She lifts the shawl and reveals Varya, who takes a bow.)*

PISHCHIK *(astonished).* Fancy that!

CHARLOTTA. That's all. *(She throws the shawl over Pishchik, makes a curtsy, and runs up into the drawing-room.)*

PISHCHIK *(hurrying after her).* You little witch... What a girl! What a girl! *(He goes out.)*

RANEVSKAYA. And still no sign of Leonid. What can he be doing in town so long? It must be all over by now; the property's sold; or the auction never came off; why does he keep me so long in suspense?

VARYA *(trying to console her).* Uncle has bought it, I am sure of that.

TROFIMOV *(mockingly).* Oh, yes, of course!

VARYA. Grannie sent him a power of attorney to buy it in her name and transfer the mortgage. She's done it for Anya's sake. I'm perfectly sure God will be merciful and Uncle will buy it.

RANEVSKAYA. Your Yaroslavl grannie sent fifteen thousand roubles to buy the property in her name—she doesn't trust us—but that's not enough even to pay the interest. *(She covers her face with her hands.)* My fate is being decided today, yes, my fate.

TROFIMOV *(teasing Varya).* Madame Lopakhina!

VARYA *(angrily).* Eternal student! He's been expelled from the University twice.

RANEVSKAYA. Why do you get angry, Varya? What if he calls you Madame Lopakhina for fun. You can marry Lopakhin if you like, he's a nice likeable man: you needn't if you don't. Nobody wants to force you, my pet.

VARYA. I take it very seriously, Mamma. He's a nice man and I like him.

RANEVSKAYA. Then marry him. I can't see what you're waiting for.

VARYA. But I can't propose to him myself, can I? For two years now everybody's been talking about him to me, everyone; but he either says nothing or makes a joke of it. Of course, I understand. He's growing rich, he's always busy and has no time for me. If I had some money, just a little, even a hundred roubles, I would give up everything and go away. I would become a nun.

TROFIMOV *(mocking).* What bliss!

VARYA *(to Trofimov).* A student ought to be intelligent. *(In a gentler tone, crying.)* How ugly you've grown, Petya. How old you look! *(To Ranevskaya, no longer crying.)* But I can't be idle, Mamma. I must have something to do every minute of the day.

Yasha comes in

YASHA *(restraining his laughter with an effort).* Yepikhodov's broken a billiard cue. *(He goes out.)*

VARYA. What's Yepikhodov doing here? Who gave him leave to play billiards? I don't understand these people. *(She goes out.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Don't tease her, Petya. Don't you see that she's unhappy enough as it is?

TROFIMOV. I wish she wouldn't be such a busybody, always meddling in other people's affairs. All summer she's given Anya and me no peace. She's afraid we might fall in love with each other. What business is it of hers? Besides, I never gave her any grounds. I'm not likely to be so commonplace. We are above love.

RANEVSKAYA. Then I suppose I must be beneath love. *(Deeply agitated.)* Why doesn't Leonid come? Oh, if only I knew whether the property's sold or not! It seems such an incredible calamity that I don't know what to think. I'm bewildered... I shall burst out screaming, I shall do something idiotic. Save me, Petya, tell me something, talk to me!

TROFIMOV. What does it matter whether the property

is sold today or not? It's all over and done with. There's no turning back, the path is overgrown. Calm yourself, dear Madame Ranevskaya. You mustn't deceive yourself any longer; for once you must face the truth.

RANEVSKAYA. What truth? You can see what's true, and what's untrue, but I seem to have lost my eyesight—I see nothing. My dear boy, you solve every great problem so boldly, but tell me, Petya, isn't that because you're young, because you never had to suffer in solving any problem of yours? You look boldly ahead. Isn't that only because you don't see or expect anything dreadful, because life is still hidden from your young eyes? You are bolder, honester, deeper than we are, but think about it all, show me but a hair's breadth of consideration, take pity on me. Don't you see? I was born here, my father and mother lived here, and so did my grandfather; I love this house; without the cherry orchard my life has no meaning for me, and if it must be sold, then for Heaven's sake sell me too! *(Embracing Trofimov and kissing him on the forehead.)* My little boy was drowned here. *(Crying.)* Be kind to me, dear, good Petya.

TROFIMOV. You know I feel for you with all my heart.

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, of course, only you ought to have said it somehow differently. *(A telegram falls to the floor as she takes out her handkerchief.)* I am so wretched today, you can't imagine! All this noise jars on me, I start at every sound. I tremble all over, but I can't remain alone—the silence terrifies me. Don't judge me harshly, Petya; I love you like a son. I would gladly let Anya marry you—I swear I would—only, my dear boy, you must work, Petya, you must get your degree at least. You do nothing—you're tossed about from place to place—so odd, isn't it? You agree, don't you? And you must do something to your beard to make it grow nicer. *(Laughing.)* How funny you look!

TROFIMOV *(picking up the telegram).* I don't wish to be an Adonis.

RANEVSKAYA. It's a telegram from Paris. I get one every day. One came yesterday, another today. That savage is ill again, he's in a bad way... He asks me to forgive him and to come, and I really ought to go to Paris to be with him. You look at me sternly—but what am I to do, my dear boy, what am I to do? He's ill, he's lonely and unhappy. Who is to look after him? Who is to keep him from doing stupid things, to give him his medicine at the right time? Why should I be ashamed to own it? I love him, that's plain. I love him. It's like a millstone tied round my neck, it's dragging me down to the bottom, but I love my stone and can't live without it. *(She presses Trofimov's hand.)* Don't think ill of me, Petya, don't say anything—please don't.

TROFIMOV *(through tears).* Do forgive my bluntness, for God's sake, but the man has robbed you.

RANEVSKAYA. No, no, no! *(Stopping her ears.)* You mustn't say that!

TROFIMOV. He's a scoundrel; everybody sees it but yourself; he's a petty scoundrel, a nonentity.

RANEVSKAYA *(angry but speaking with restraint).* You're twenty-six or twenty-seven, and you still have the mentality of a schoolboy!

TROFIMOV. Who cares?

RANEVSKAYA. It's time you were a man! You should understand people who do love. You ought to love someone yourself, you ought to be in love! *(Angrily.)* Yes, yes! It's not purity—you're simply a prig, an oddity, a freak.

TROFIMOV *(horrified).* How can she talk like that?

RANEVSKAYA. "I am above love!" You're not above love, but simply, as our Feers here says, a good-for-nothing. At your age you ought to have had a mistress!

TROFIMOV *(aghast).* This is awful! How can she talk

like that! *(Going quickly into the drawing-room, clasping his head.)* This is awful! I can't stand it! I'm going. *(He goes off, but returns at once.)* I don't want anything more to do with you. *(He goes off into the ante-room.)*

RANEVSKAYA *(calling after him).* Wait a minute, Petya! Don't be silly, I was only joking! Petya!

Someone is heard running downstairs, and then there is a sudden crash. Anya and Varya scream behind the scenes but a moment later there is a sound of laughter

RANEVSKAYA. What's the matter?

Anya runs in

ANYA *(laughing).* Petya's tumbled downstairs. *(She runs out again.)*

RANEVSKAYA. What a queer fellow he is!

The stationmaster is seen halting in the middle of the drawing-room and reciting Alexei Tolstoy's poem, *The Sinner.* Everybody stops to listen, but after a few lines the sound of a waltz is heard from the ante-room, and he breaks off. All dance. Trofimov, Anya, Varya, and Ranevskaya come in from the ante-room

RANEVSKAYA. Come, Petya—come, you pure soul. I apologize. Let's dance. *(She dances with Trofimov.)*

Anya and Varya dance. Feers comes in and leans his walking-stick against the side door. Yasha comes in from the sitting-room; he stands looking at the dancers

YASHA. Well, grandfather?

FEERS. I'm not feeling well. In the old days it was generals and barons and admirals that came to our dances, and now we send for the post-office clerk and the stationmaster, and even they are not too anxious to come. I feel sort of weak all over. The old master, their grandfather, used to give us sealing wax for all complaints. I've taken sealing wax every day for twenty years and more. Maybe that's what's kept me alive.

YASHA. You're a nuisance, grandad. *(Yawning.)* It's time for you to peg out.

FEERS. Ah! You ... good-for-nothing. *(He mumbles to himself.)*

Trofimov and Ranevskaya dance in the drawing-room, and then come dancing into the sitting-room

RANEVSKAYA. Merci. I'll sit down. *(She sits.)* I'm tired.

Anya comes in

ANYA *(excitedly).* There was a man in the kitchen who said that the cherry orchard was sold today.

RANEVSKAYA. Sold? Who to?

ANYA. He didn't say. He's gone.

She dances with Trofimov. Both dance off into the drawing-room

YASHA. It was some old fellow chattering—a stranger.

FEERS. Master isn't back yet, and he's wearing his light overcoat. He'll catch cold as like as not. Ah, young wood, green wood!

RANEVSKAYA. This is killing me. Yasha, go and find out who it was sold to.

YASHA. Why, the old man's gone long ago. *(He laughs.)*

RANEVSKAYA *(somewhat vexed).* What are you laughing at? What are you so glad about?

YASHA. He's a funny fellow, is Yepikhodov. A silly chap, Twenty-Two Misfortunes!

RANEVSKAYA. Feers, where will you go if the estate is sold?

FEERS. I'll go where you tell me to.

RANEVSKAYA. What's wrong with you? You look ill. You ought to be in bed.

FEERS *(ironically).* Oh yes, I'll go to bed, but who will hand the things round and give orders? There's no one else in the whole house.

YASHA. May I ask a favour of you, Madame, please? If you go to Paris again, kindly take me with you. It's absolutely impossible for me to stay here. *(Looking about, in an undertone.)* What's the use of talking? You can see for yourself this is no educated country, the people have no morals, and the boredom! The food in the kitchen is something shocking, and on top of it all old Feers goes about mumbling all sorts of silly things. Take me back with you, please do!

Pishchik comes in

PISHCHIK. May I have the pleasure ... a little turn of this waltz, charming lady? *(Ranevskaya takes his arm.)* Enchanting lady, I really must borrow those 180 roubles off you. *(Dancing.)* 180 roubles. *(They dance off into the drawing-room.)*

YASHA *(humming).*

"Oh, will you understand
The turmoil of my heart?.."

In the drawing-room, a figure in grey top hat and check trousers is waving its arms and jumping about. Shouts of "Bravo, Charlotta"

DUNYASHA *(stopping to powder her face.)* Miss Anya tells me I'm to dance—there are so many gentlemen and so few ladies. But dancing makes me giddy and makes my heart palpitate. Just now the gentleman from the post office said something so nice to me that it quite took my breath away.

Music dies down

FEERS. What did he say to you?

DUNYASHA. He said I was like a flower.

YASHA *(yawning).* What an ignoramus! *(He goes out.)*

DUNYASHA. Like a flower! I am so lady-like and refined, I love compliments.

FEERS. You'll come to a bad end.

Yepikhodov comes in

YEPIKHODOV. You are not pleased to see me, Dunyasha, as if I were an insect or something. *(Sighing.)* Ah! Life!

DUNYASHA. What is it you want?

YEPIKHODOV. Undoubtedly, perhaps, you are right. *(Sighing.)* But of course, if one regards it from the point of view, if I may allow myself the expression, and with apologies for my frankness, you have completely reduced me to a state of mind. I quite appreciate my destiny; every day some misfortune happens to me, and I have long since grown accustomed to it, and face my fate with a smile. You have passed your word to me, and although I—

DUNYASHA. Let us talk of this some other time; if you don't mind, but now leave me alone. I am busy meditating. *(Toying with her fan.)*

YEPIKHODOV. Every day some misfortune befalls me, and yet, if I may venture to say so, I meet them with smiles and even laughter.

Varya comes in from the drawing-room

VARYA *(to Yepikhodov).* Are you still here, Semyon? You seem to pay no attention to what you're told. *(To Dunyasha.)* Go along, Dunyasha. *(To Yepikhodov.)* First you play billiards and break a cue, and then you saunter about the drawing-room as if you were a guest!

YEPIKHODOV. You really cannot, if I may so express myself, call me to account.

VARYA. I'm not calling you to account, I'm just telling you. All you can do is walk about, without ever doing any work; and why on earth we keep a clerk at all Heaven only knows.

YEPIKHODOV *(offended).* Whether I work, or walk, or eat, or play billiards is a question to be decided only by my elders and people who understand.

VARYA. You dare to talk to me like that! *(Flaring up.)* You dare! So I don't understand, do I? You get out of here this minute! Do you hear me? This minute!

YEPIKHODOV *(cowed).* I must beg you to express yourself in gentler language.

VARYA *(beside herself).* You get out this very instant. Out you go! *(Following him as he backs towards the door.)* Twenty-Two Misfortunes! Get out and stay out! Don't let me put eyes on you here again!

YEPIKHODOV *(off-stage).* I shall lodge a complaint against you.

VARYA. What! You're coming back, are you? *(Seizing the stick left behind by Feers.)* Come on! Come on! I'll teach you a lesson! Ah, so you're coming? There, take that. *(She swings the stick at the very moment that Lopakhin comes in.)*

LOPAKHIN. Very much obliged to you.

VARYA. *(angrily and ironically).* Sorry!

LOPAKHIN. That's all right. I'm very grateful for your warm reception.

VARYA. Not at all. *(She walks away, then looks round and asks in a gentle voice.)* I didn't hurt you, I hope?

LOPAKHIN. Oh no, nothing to speak of. I shall have a bump like a goose's egg, that's all.

Voices from the drawing-room: "Lopakhin has come! Yermolai is here!"

PISHCHIK. Let my eyes see him, let my ears hear him! *(He and Lopakhin kiss.)* You smell of cognac a bit, old man. We're having a good time here, too.

Ranevskaya comes in

RANEVSKAYA. Is it you, Yermolai? Why have you been so long? Where's Leonid?

LOPAKHIN. Mr Gayev arrived with me. He'll be here in a minute.

RANEVSKAYA *(agitated).* Well? Did the sale come off? Come, speak up!

LOPAKHIN *(embarrassed, afraid of betraying his joy).* The sale was over by four o'clock. We missed the train and had to wait till half past nine. *(Sighing heavily.)* I'm a little giddy.

Gayev comes in. In his right hand he carries parcels, with his left hand he is wiping away his tears.

RANEVSKAYA. Well, Leonid? Come, let's hear it! *(Impatiently, crying.)* Be quick, for Heaven's sake, be quick.

GAYEV *(answering her only with a wave of his hand; to Feers, crying).* Here, take these. Here are some anchovies and Black Sea herrings. I've had nothing all day. Lord, what I've been through! *(Through the open door of the billiard-room come the click of the billiard balls and Yasha's voice: "Seven, eighteen!" Gayev's expression changes; he stops crying.)* I'm frightfully tired. Come and help me change, Feers. *(He goes across the drawing-room to his own room, Feers following.)*

PISHCHIK. What about the sale? Come!

RANEVSKAYA. Is the orchard sold?

LOPAKHIN. Yes.

RANEVSKAYA. Who bought it?

LOPAKHIN. I did. *(Pause.) (Ranevskaya is overwhelmed at the news. She would have fallen but for the chair and table by her. Varya takes the keys from her waistband, throws them on the floor in the middle of the room, and goes out.)* I bought it. Wait a bit, don't rush me, my head's in a whirl—I can't speak. *(Laughing.)* When we got to the sale, Deriganov was there already. Mr Gayev had

only 15,000, and Deriganov bid 30,000 over and above the mortgage, straight off. Well—I went for him and bid 40,000. He bid 45,000. I said 55,000, and so we went on, he going up by 5 thousands and me by ten. Well, and so it ended. I bid 90 over the mortgage, and it was knocked down to me. Now the cherry orchard's mine! Mine! *(He bursts out laughing.)* God in heaven! The cherry orchard is mine! Tell me that I'm drunk, that I'm off my head, that it's all a dream. *(Stamping his feet.)* Don't laugh at me! If only my father and my grandfather could rise from their graves and see it all! How their Yermolai—their beaten and ignorant Yermolai, who used to run about barefoot in the winter—how this same Yermolai had bought the finest estate in the world! I have bought the estate where my father and grandfather were slaves, where they weren't even allowed into the kitchen. I'm asleep, it's only a dream, it isn't real... It's my imagination. *(He picks up the keys, smiling affectionately.)* She's thrown down the keys to show she's no longer mistress here. *(Jingling them.)* Well, never mind. *(The musicians are heard tuning up.)* Hey, musicians, play! I want to hear you. Come, all of you, and see Yermolai Lopakhin take his axe to the cherry orchard, come and see the trees fall down! We'll build cottages here and our grandsons and greatgrandsons shall see a new life. Strike up, music! *(The band plays. Ranevskaya sinks into a chair and weeps bitterly.)*

LOPAKHIN *(reproachfully).* Oh, why, why didn't you listen to me? You can't get it back now, you poor dear. *(With tears.)* Oh, that all this were past and over! That our miserable topsy-turvy life were changed!

PISHCHIK *(taking him by the arm, in an undertone).* She's crying. Let's go into the drawing-room and leave her alone. Come on. *(Holding him by the arm and going up towards the drawing-room.)*

LOPAKHIN. What's the matter? Play your best, musicians! Let everything be as I wish. *(Ironically.)* Here

comes the new landowner, the owner of the cherry orchard! *(Knocking up by accident against a table and nearly upsetting the candelabra.)* Never mind, I can pay for everything!

He goes out with Pishchik. Nobody remains on the stage or in the drawing-room except Ranevskaya, who sits huddled up weeping bitterly. The band plays softly. Anya and Trofimov come in quickly. Anya goes to her mother and kneels before her. Trofimov stands at the entrance to the drawing-room

ANYA. Mamma! Are you crying, Mamma? My dear, good, sweet Mamma! Darling, I love you! I bless you! The cherry orchard is sold, it's gone, that's quite true, quite true. But don't cry, Mamma! You've still got your life before you, you've still got your good and pure soul. Come with me, darling—let's go away from here. We'll plant a new garden, lovelier than this. You will see it, you'll understand, and happiness, deep, quiet happiness, will descend on your soul, like the sun at dusk, and you'll smile, Mamma. Come, darling, come with me!

Curtain

ACT FOUR

Same scene as in Act One. There are neither window-curtains nor pictures. The little furniture left is piled up in a corner, as if for sale. A feeling of desolation. By the outer door and in the background of the scene are trunks, travelling bags, etc. On the left the door is open and the voices of Varya and Anya are audible. Lopakhin stands waiting. Yasha holds a tray with wine-glasses filled with champagne. Yepikhodov is tying up a box in the ante-room. A hum of voices behind the scene; the peasants have come to say good-bye

GAYEV *(off-stage).* Thank you, my lads, thank you.

YASHA. The common people have come to say

good-bye. I'm of the opinion, Mr Lopakhin, that they're good people but rather ignorant.

The hubbub of voices dies away. Ranevskaya and Gayev come in from the ante-room. She is not crying, but she is pale, her cheeks are quivering—she cannot speak

GAYEV. You gave them your purse, Lyuba. You oughtn't to have done that, really.

RANEVSKAYA. I couldn't help it, I couldn't. *(Both go out.)*

LOPAKHIN *(calling after them through the doorway).* Will you have a glass at parting? Please! Just a glass. I forgot to bring any from the town, and could only get one bottle at the station. Do come. *(Pause.)* What, you won't have any? *(Returning from the door.)* If I'd known, I wouldn't have bought it. Then I shan't have any either. *(Yasha sets the tray down carefully on a chair.)* Drink it yourself, Yasha.

YASHA. Here's to our departure! Good luck to them that stay! *(Drinking.)* This isn't real champagne, you take my word for it.

LOPAKHIN. Eight roubles a bottle. *(Pause.)* It's devilish cold in here.

YASHA. We haven't heated the stoves today since we're all going away. *(He laughs.)*

LOPAKHIN. Why are you laughing?

YASHA. Just pleasure.

LOPAKHIN. Here we are in October, yet it's as calm and sunny as in summer. Fine building weather. *(Calls out looking at his watch.)* Don't forget that there's only forty-seven minutes left before the train goes. You must start for the station in twenty minutes. Hurry up.

Trofimov comes in, in an overcoat, from out of doors

TROFIMOV. I think it's time to start. The carriages are here. What the deuce has become of my galoshes? I've lost

them. *(Calling out.)* Anya, my galoshes aren't here. I can't find them!

LOPAKHIN. I've got to go to Kharkov. I'm going in the same train with you. I'll spend the winter in Kharkov. I've been loafing about all this time with you people, and fretting for want of work. I can't live without work, I don't know what to do with my hands—they dangle about as if they didn't belong to me.

TROFIMOV. Well, we're leaving now, and you'll be able to get back to your beneficent labours.

LOPAKHIN. Have a glass.

TROFIMOV. No, thanks.

LOPAKHIN. Well, so you're off to Moscow?

TROFIMOV. Yes, I'll see them into town, and go to Moscow tomorrow.

LOPAKHIN. Well, well, I suppose the professors haven't started their lectures yet, they're waiting for you to arrive.

TROFIMOV. That's no concern of yours.

LOPAKHIN. How many years have you been up at the University?

TROFIMOV. Try and think of some new joke—this one's flat and stale. *(Looking for his galoshes.)* Look here, I suppose we shan't meet again, so let me give you a bit of advice as a keepsake: Don't flap your hands about! Get out of that habit. Building cottages, prophesying that summer residents will become small free-holders, is also a sort of hand-flapping. Well, when all's said and done, I like you. You have thin, delicate fingers, like an artist's, you have a fine, delicate soul.

LOPAKHIN *(embracing him).* Good-bye, my dear boy. Thank you for everything. Take some money from me for the journey if you want it.

TROFIMOV. What for? I don't want it.

LOPAKHIN. But you haven't got any.

TROFIMOV. Yes, I have. Many thanks. I got some for

a translation. Here it is, in my pocket. *(Anxiously.)* I can't find my galoshes anywhere!

VARYA *(from the next room).* Here, take your garbage away. *(She flings a pair of galoshes on the stage).*

TROFIMOV. What are you so cross about, Varya? Humph!.. But these aren't my galoshes!

LOPAKHIN. I sowed three thousand acres of poppy last spring and cleared forty thousand profit. What a picture they made, those poppies in flower! As I was saying, I've made forty thousand, and I'm offering you some because I can afford to. What's the good of putting on airs? I'm a peasant... I say what I mean...

TROFIMOV. Your father was a peasant, mine was a chemist—but that proves nothing whatever. *(Lopakhin takes out his wallet.)* Put that away. If you offered me two hundred thousand I wouldn't take it. I am a free man, and nothing that you prize so highly, all of you, rich and poor alike, has the least power over me—to me it's like thistle-down floating on the wind. I can do without you—I can go past you, I'm strong and proud. I'm in the foremost ranks of mankind, which is advancing towards the highest truth, the highest happiness possible on earth.

LOPAKHIN. Will you get there?

TROFIMOV. Yes. *(Pause.)* I will get there myself, or I will show others the way.

The sound of axes at work is heard in the distance

LOPAKHIN. Well, good-bye, old chap; it is time to start. Here we stand swaggering to each other, and life goes on while we're at it. When I work for hours without getting tired, I am easy in my mind and I seem to know why I exist. But God alone knows what most of the people in Russia were born for. Well, who cares? It doesn't affect the circulation of work, as they say. I hear Mr Gayev has accepted a situation at a bank—6,000 roubles a year. He won't stick it out, though, he's too lazy.

ANYA. *(in the doorway).* Mamma says please don't start chopping down the orchard till she's gone.

TROFIMOV. Really, you might have had that much tact. *(He goes off to the ante-room.)*

LOPAKHIN. Of course. I'll stop them at once. What fools! *(He goes out.)*

ANYA. Has Feers been sent to the hospital?

YASHA. I told them this morning. They must have sent him.

ANYA *(to Yepikhodov, who crosses the drawing-room).* Please find out if Feers has been sent to the hospital.

YASHA *(offended).* I told Yegor this morning. What's the good of asking a dozen times?

YEPIKHODOV. Old Feers, in my conclusive opinion, is hardly worth tinkering up; it's time he was dispatched to his forefathers. I can only say I envy him. *(Putting down a suitcase on a bandbox and crushing it flat.)* There you are! I knew it! *(He goes out.)*

YASHA *(jeering).* Twenty-Two Misfortunes!

VARYA *(off-stage.)* Has Feers been sent to the hospital?

ANYA. Yes.

VARYA. Why didn't they take the note to the doctor?

ANYA. Then we must send it after them. *(She goes out.)*

VARYA *(from the adjoining room).* Where's Yasha? Tell him his mother's come to say good-bye to him.

YASHA *(with a gesture of impatience).* This is enough to try anybody's patience.

Dunyasha has been busying herself with the luggage. Seeing Yasha, alone, she approaches him

DUNYASHA. You might just give me one glance, Yasha. You are going away—leaving me. *(Crying and throwing her arms round his neck.)*

YASHA. What's the good of crying? *(He drinks the champagne.)* In six days I shall be back in Paris. Tomorrow we take the express and off we go. I can hardly believe it. *Vive la France!* This place doesn't suit me. I can't stomach it ... it can't be helped. I've seen enough ignorance here—I'm fed up. *(Drinking champagne.)* What's the good of crying? Behave yourself properly, and you'll have no call to cry.

DUNYASHA *(powders her face, looking into a pocket-mirror).* Send me a letter from Paris. I've been so fond of you, Yasha, so fond! I am a delicate creature, Yasha.

YASHA. Here's somebody coming. *(He busies himself with the luggage, singing under his breath.)*

Ranevskaya, Gayev, Anya and Charlotta come in

GAYEV. Shall we start? It's nearly time. *(Looking at Yasha.)* Who is it smells of herring?

RANEVSKAYA. We must set off in ten minutes. *(Looking round the room.)* Good-bye, dear old house, our old grandad! When winter is past and spring comes again, you will be here no more; they will have pulled you down. Oh, think of all these walls have seen! *(Kissing Anya passionately.)* My treasure, you look radiant, your eyes flash like two diamonds. Are you glad? Very glad?

ANYA. Yes. We're beginning a new life, Mamma.

GAYEV *(gaily).* She's quite right, everything's all right now. Before the cherry orchard was sold we were all worried and miserable; but once the thing was settled finally and irrevocably, we all calmed down and even felt cheerful. I'm a bank clerk now, a financier ... cannon off the red! And you, Lyuba, whatever you may say, you're looking ever so much better, not a doubt about it.

RANEVSKAYA. Yes, my nerves are better, that's true. *(She is helped on with her hat and coat.)* I sleep well now. Take my things out, Yasha. We must be off. *(To Anya.)* We shall meet soon, darling ... I'm off to Paris; I

can live on the money your grandmother sent from Yaroslavl to buy the property. God bless your grandmother! Only I'm afraid the money won't last long.

ANYA. You'll come back very, very soon, won't you, Mamma? I'll study hard and pass my exam at high school and then get a job and help you. We'll read all sorts of books together, won't we, Mamma? *(Kissing her mother's hands.)* We'll read in the long autumn evenings, we'll read heaps of books, and a new, wonderful world will open before us. *(Musingly.)* Come soon, Mamma!

RANEVSKAYA. I will, my angel. *(Embracing her.)*

Lopakhin comes in. Charlotta hums a song

GAYEV. Happy Charlotta, she's singing.

CHARLOTTA *(taking a bundle which looks like a swaddled baby).* Hushabye, my baby... *(The baby answers, "Wah-wah.")* Hush, my little one, hush, hush, my pretty one! *("Wah, Wah.")* You'll break your mother's heart. *(She throws the bundle down on the floor again.)* Don't forget to find me a new place, please. I can't go on like this.

LOPAKHIN. We'll find you one, Charlotta, don't you worry.

GAYEV. Everybody's deserting us. Varya's going, too. We've suddenly grown useless.

CHARLOTTA. There's no place where I can live in town. I have to go. *(She hums.)* What do I care?

Pishchik comes in

LOPAKHIN. Nature's masterpiece!

PISHCHIK *(panting).* Oh!.. Let me catch my breath! I'm all done up!.. My dear friends! Give me some water.

GAYEV. Want some money, I suppose? No, thank you; I'll keep out of harm's way. *(He goes out.)*

PISHCHIK. It's ages since I was last here, fairest lady. *(To Lopakhin.)* You here? Glad to see you, you man of giant intellect. Take ... here. *(Giving Lopakhin money.)*

Four hundred roubles. That leaves me owing you eight hundred and forty.

LOPAKHIN *(amazed, shrugging his shoulders).* It's like a thing in a dream! Where did you get it from?

PISHCHIK. Wait a bit ... I'm hot... A most extraordinary thing. Some Englishmen came along and found a sort of white clay on my land. *(To Ranevskaya.)* And here's four hundred for you, lovely, wonderful lady. *(He gives her money.)* The rest another time. *(Drinking water.)* A young man in the train was saying just now that ... some great philosopher advises us all to jump off house tops. Jump, he says, that's the clue to life. *(With an astonished air.)* Fancy that! More water!

LOPAKHIN. Who were the Englishmen?

PISHCHIK. I leased them the plot with the clay in it for twenty-four years. And now, you'll excuse me ... I must be trotting on. I'm going to Znoikov's, to Kardamonov's... I owe everybody money. *(Drinking.)* Goodbye to everyone, I'll drop in on Thursday.

RANEVSKAYA. We're just moving into town, and tomorrow I go abroad.

PISHCHIK. What! *(Alarmed.)* You moving into town? Oh, I see—the furniture, trunks... Well, never mind. *(Through his tears.)* It can't be helped. People of powerful intellect, those Englishmen. It's all right. Be happy. God help you ... it's all right. Everything in this world must come to an end. *(He kisses Ranevskaya's hand.)* If ever the news reaches you that I have come to an end, give a thought to the old ... horse here, and say, "Once there lived a certain Simeonov-Pishchik, God rest his soul." Wonderful weather we're having... Yes. *(He goes out, deeply moved, but returns at once and says from the doorway.)* Dashenka sent her compliments. *(He goes out.)*

RANEVSKAYA. Now we can go. I have only two things on my mind. One is poor old Feers. *(Looking at her watch.)* We can still stay five minutes.

ANYA. Feers has been sent to the hospital already, Mamma. Yasha sent him off this morning.

RANEVSKAYA. My other anxiety is Varya. She's used to getting up early and working, and now that she has no work to do she's like a fish out of water. She has grown thin and pale and taken to crying, poor dear. *(Pause.)* You know very well, Yermolai, I always hoped to see her married to you, and everything seemed to point to your getting married. *(She whispers to Anya, who nods to Charlotta, and both go out.)* She loves you—you like her. And I can't make out why you seem to fight shy of each other. I can't understand it!

LOPAKHIN. I don't understand it either, to tell you the truth. It all seems so odd. I'm ready... If there's still time, let's settle it; straight off and have done with it; without you there, I feel as if I should never propose to her.

RANEVSKAYA. Splendid! After all, it shouldn't take more than a minute. I'll call her at once.

LOPAKHIN. And here's the champagne all ready. *(Looking at the glasses.)* Empty! Someone's drunk it. *(Yasha coughs.)* That's what they call lapping it up!

RANEVSKAYA *(animated).* Capital! We'll all go away.... Allez, Yasha. I'll call her. *(At the door.)* Varya, leave all that and come here. Come along! *(She goes out with Yasha.)*

LOPAKHIN *(looking at his watch).* Ahem. *(Pause.)*

A stifled laugh and whispering behind the door; at last Varya comes in

VARYA *(examining the luggage at great length).* It's very odd, I can't find it anywhere.

LOPAKHIN. What are you looking for?

VARYA. I packed it myself, and can't remember. *(Pause.)*

LOPAKHIN. Where are you going now, Miss Varya?

VARYA. Me? I'm going to the Ragulins'. They've engaged me to look after the place for them—to be housekeeper, or something like that.

LOPAKHIN. Oh, at Yashnevo? That's about fifty miles from here. *(Pause.)* Well, so life in this house is over now.

VARYA *(examining the luggage).* Wherever can it be? Perhaps I put it in the trunk. Yes, life here is over—there will be no more of it.

LOPAKHIN. And I'm off to Kharkov now—by the same train. A lot of business to do. I'm leaving Yepikhodov to look after the place. I've taken him on.

VARYA. Have you?

LOPAKHIN. This time last year we had snow already, if you remember; but now it's fine and sunny. Still it's cold for all that. Three degrees below.

VARYA. Really? I didn't look. *(Pause.)* And then the thermometer is broken. *(Pause.)*

A VOICE *(at the door from the yard).* Mr Lopakhin!

LOPAKHIN *(as if he had only been waiting to be called).* Coming! *(He goes out quickly.)*

Varya sits on the floor, puts her head on a bundle, and sobs softly. The door opens, and Ranevskaya comes in cautiously

RANEVSKAYA. Well? *(Pause.)* We must be off.

VARYA *(she has wiped her eyes and is no longer crying).* Yes, it's time, Mother. I shall get to the Ragulins' today, if I don't miss the train.

RANEVSKAYA *(calling out).* Put on your things, Anya.

Enter Anya, then Gayev and Charlotta. Gayev wears a warm overcoat with a hood. The servants and drivers come in. Yepikhodov bustles about the luggage

RANEVSKAYA. Now we can start.

ANYA *(delighted).* We can start!

GAYEV. My friends, my dear, precious friends! Now that I am leaving this house for ever, can I keep quiet? Can I help expressing the emotions that fill my whole being now?

ANYA *(pleadingly).* Uncle!

VARYA. Uncle, please!

GAYEV *(sadly).* Cannon off the red. I'll hold my tongue.

Enter Trofimov, then Lopakhin

TROFIMOV. Come along, it's time to start.

LOPAKHIN. Yepikhodov, my coat.

RANEVSKAYA. I must stay here another minute. I feel as if I had never noticed before what the walls and ceilings of the house were like and now I look at them greedily, with such tender love.

GAYEV. I remember, when I was six years old, how I sat on this window-sill on Trinity Sunday, watching father going to church.

RANEVSKAYA. Has everything been taken?

LOPAKHIN. I think so. *(To Yepikhodov, putting on his overcoat.)* See that everything's in order, Yepikhodov.

YEPIKHODOV *(in a husky voice).* You can trust me, Mr Lopakhin.

LOPAKHIN. What's wrong with your voice?

YEPIKHODOV. I was taking a drink of water and I swallowed something.

YASHA *(contemptuously).* What ignorance!

RANEVSKAYA. We're going—and there won't be a soul left here.

LOPAKHIN. Not until spring.

Varya pulls an umbrella out of a bundle so violently that it looks as if she wanted to hit somebody. Lopakhin pretends to be frightened

VARYA. What an idea. I'd never have thought of such a thing.

TROFIMOV. Come, we'd better be going. It's time. The train will be in immediately.

VARYA. There are your galoshes, Petya, by that box. *(With tears.)* What dirty old things they are!

TROFIMOV *(putting on his galoshes).* Come along, friends.

GAYEV *(much moved, afraid of crying.)* The train—the station. Cannon off the red doublet to pot the white into the corner.

RANEVSKAYA. Let's go!

LOPAKHIN. Is everyone here? No one left behind? *(Locking the door left.)* There are things stacked in there. I must lock them up. Come on!

ANYA. Good-bye, house! Good-bye, old life!

TROFIMOV. Welcome, new life! *(He goes out with Anya.)*

Varya looks round the room, and goes out slowly. Yasha and Charlotta, with her dog, go out

LOPAKHIN. Till the spring, then. Gò on, everybody. So long! *(He goes out.)*

Ranevskaya and Gayev remain alone. They seem to have been waiting for this moment; they throw their arms round each other's necks and sob restrainedly and quietly, afraid of being overheard

GAYEV *(in despair).* My sister! My dear sister!

RANEVSKAYA. Oh, my dear orchard! My sweet lovely orchard! My life, my youth, my happiness, good-bye! Good-bye!

ANYA *(calling gaily off-stage).* Mother!

TROFIMOV *(gaily, excitedly).* Halloo!

RANEVSKAYA. One last look at the walls and the windows. Our dear mother used to walk in this room.

GAYEV. My sister! My dear sister!

ANYA *(off-stage).* Mother!
TROFIMOV *(off-stage). Halloo!*
RANEVSKAYA. *Coming! (They go out.)*

The stage is empty. There is the sound of the doors being locked up, and the carriages driving away. It grows quiet. Through the silence one can hear the sad and lonely thud of an axe on a tree. Footsteps are heard. Feers appears in the doorway right. He is dressed, as always, in his long coat and white waistcoat, with slippers on his feet.
He is ill

FEERS *(going to the door and trying the handle).* Locked. They've gone. *(Sitting down on the sofa.)* They've forgotten me. Never mind! I'll sit here a bit. Master is sure to have put on his cloth overcoat instead of his fur coat. *(He sighs anxiously.)* He hadn't me to see to it. Young wood, green wood! *(He mumbles incoherently.)* Life has gone by as if I'd never lived. *(Lying down.)* I'll lie down a bit. There's no strength left in you, none at all. Ah, you ... good-for-nothing! *(He lies motionless.)*

A distant sound is heard that seems to come from the sky, like that of a string snapping—dying away, melancholy. All is still again save the sound of the axe far away in the orchard

Curtain

1903

ANTON CHEKHOV

The name of Chekhov, the great prosewriter and playwright, is known throughout the world. His works have been translated into all the main languages of Europe, America, Asia and Africa. And his writing continues to delight readers to this day.

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born on 29 January, 1860 in the town of Taganrog. His father was the owner of a small grocer's shop. Anton attended the Taganrog High School from 1868 to 1879.

Anton was the third of six highly talented children. His brothers Alexander and Mikhail became writers, Nikolai an artist and Ivan a distinguished teacher. Their one sister, Maria, was very gifted artistically. Later Chekhov was to write: "We got our talent from father and our feelings from mother."

Pavel Chekhov's grocer's shop was not a very profitable business. The family's financial position deteriorated considerably in 1875 when the two eldest brothers, Alexander and Nikolai, went to study in Moscow, one at the University, the other at the School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture. In the spring of 1876 Pavel Chekhov declared bankruptcy and went off secretly to join his sons in Moscow. Shortly afterwards the other members of the family went to Moscow as well, all except the sixteen-year-old Anton who remained in Taganrog to finish his schooling.

Anton spent three years in Taganrog without his family, earning his living by coaching. In 1879 he obtained his school-leaving certificate. After managing to get a scholarship from the Taganrog municipal board to enable a pupil born in the town to receive further education, he set off for Moscow, where he entered the medical faculty of Moscow University.

In 1884 Chekhov graduated from university and began work as a general practitioner. As time passed, however, his literary activities, begun in 1880, gradually took up more and more of his time.

For the first seven years Chekhov contributed to small satirical magazines, but in 1888 *Severny Vestnik (The Northern Herald),* a prestigious Moscow literary review, began to publish him. His writing was recognised by such eminent literary figures as Dmitri Grigorovich, Vladimir Korolenko, Alexei Pleshcheyev and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin.

In 1890 Chekhov went on a journey to "places of unendurable suffering", the convict island of Sakhalin. He visited and studied the prisons and settlements there, talked to convicts and other inhabitants and kept cards for each of them (10,000 in all). The writer took a special interest in political convicts and exiles. This journey produced a book of essays entitled *The Island of Sakhalin,* on which Chekhov worked from 1890 to 1894. In 1891-1892, when Central Russia was suffering from terrible famine, Chekhov financed the setting up of canteens, collected donations by subscription for the famine fund, and gave peasants free medical treatment.

In February 1892 Chekhov purchased the small estate of Melikhovo not far from Moscow, and lived there from 1892 to 1899 devoting a great deal of time and effort to his medical practice. He was on very good terms with the local peasants, particularly the children.

It was in Melikhovo that Chekhov produced many of

his finest stories. In 1895 he wrote: "I am indebted to literature for the happiest days and greatest affections in my life."

Chekhov was suffering from tuberculosis, however, and his condition was deteriorating. His doctors ordered a change of climate, and in 1899 Chekhov sold Melikhovo and moved to Yalta. Here too he played an active part in the community, organising a fund to build a sanatorium for teachers and students and supervising the building of it. He also carried on an extensive correspondence, *inter alia*, with some of the most famous figures in literature and the arts of that day. He was visited in the Crimea by Ivan Bunin, Vladimir Korolenko, Alexander Kuprin and other famous writers. Here too he had several meetings with Lev Tolstoy. Chekhov kept in close touch with the Moscow Art Theatre set up in 1898 and wrote plays for it. In May 1901 he married an actress from the theatre, Olga Knipper.

Chekhov's life in Yalta was a constant struggle against his illness. He longed for Moscow, which he visited frequently.

While he was living in Yalta Chekhov made the acquaintance of Maxim Gorky. In 1898 Gorky sent him a two-volume edition of his works with a covering letter expressing his affection for him: "I should like to make you a declaration of the most sincere and ardent love which I have felt, unrequited, for you ever since I was a youngster. I should like to express my admiration for your remarkable talent..."

The writers corresponded frequently. Gorky learnt a great deal from Chekhov. When Gorky's election to the Russian Academy was declared invalid by the Tsar because of his revolutionary activity, Chekhov and Korolenko resigned from the Academy in protest.

The writer's condition grew very grave. In June 1904 Chekhov went to take the waters at Badenweiler in Germany with his wife. After a slight improvement, his

condition deteriorated once more and he died on 2 July in the night. His doctor described his last few minutes as follows: "He was about to die, yet he remained calm, like a hero, right up to the last minute. When I approached his bed, he greeted me calmly with the words 'I shall die soon, doctor.'" The writer's coffin was taken to Moscow, where he was buried on 9 July in Novodevichy Cemetery.

* * *

Chekhov began writing in the 1880s, a complex and contradictory period characterised by political reaction, harsh persecution of members of the Russian emancipation movement and the prevalence of philistine attitudes. However, Lenin calls this period of reaction in the 1880s a time of "thought and intellect", "when progressive thinkers drew a line under the past and began to construct new systems and new methods of research."

In his first six years of writing Chekhov developed as a comic writer, perfecting the genre of the very short story. Under the pseudonym of Antosha Chekhonte he poked fun at philistine habits and the boorishness and coarseness of the powers-that-be. He created some perfect comic miniatures exposing the dreary triviality of the lives of officials and philistines, the servility of people brought up in a system where the "masters of life" enjoyed unlimited power.

In his early comic stories Chekhov deliberately oversimplifies situations. The characters are minor officials, peevish wives, spiteful mother-in-laws and henpecked husbands. Their world is one of foolish, abnormal relations. The situations in these stories and sketches are anecdotal and the characters comic.

Life in the 1880s also provided rich material for serious reflection on the tragic position of man in society. This

tragic element is revealed in depth in Chekhov's later stories, such as "Grief", "Misery" and "Vanka".

In the collection *Motley Stories* (1886) Chekhov showed himself to be a realist writer capable not only of painting a vivid picture of everyday life and manners, but also of submitting them to profound social analysis. The mean, base and false in life became the main target of his satire.

The figure of the complacent, insolent, coarse and ignorant sergeant ("Warrant Officer Prishibeyev"—1885), a voluntary spy and stifler of all that is free, is brilliantly drawn and a classic of satirical literature.

In the story "The Mask" (1884) Chekhov pokes fun mercilessly at liberal intellectuals who grovel to their masters, such as the rich financier Pyatigorov, an arrogant bully. In many stories the writer ridicules the boorishness and obduracy of people in authority in relation to their underlings (such as "Pandemonium"—1886).

In the second, transitional period of his writing (1887-1889) Chekhov produced some major works of considerable sociophilosophical and poetic significance, such as the stories "The Steppe" and "The Lights" (1888) and "A Dreary Tale" (1889).

"The Steppe" embodies Chekhov's impressions of the southern steppeland as a child and adolescent, later reinforced by the writer's visit to his native parts in the spring of 1887. This is one of his most lyrical works.

The steppe and the wide road are seen through the eyes of a sensitive and impressionable young boy, Yegorushka. Four days of travelling along the road, scenes of the countryside, meetings with all sorts of people and the most varied impressions combine to create a broad canvas of life. This story of Chekhov's emanates his profound love of his native land and the Russian people.

The theme of loneliness runs through the story. Literally all the characters in it feel lonely, even though

they are brought together for a short time by the circumstances of the journey.

The theme of loneliness in Chekhov's writing is linked with that of happiness. For Kuzmichov and Father Khristofor happiness lies in money; for the industrialist Varlamov money is power and a *raison d'être.* But Solomon, a poor man, burns the money he has inherited for he regards it as a source of evil.

Happiness does not lie in money or in wealth, Chekhov tells us. His characters who have made money are lonely, unintelligent people. They are incapable of appreciating noble sentiments and the beauty of the life around them. Happiness is possible only when "the soul responds to its fine, austere homeland," when a person feels bound to other people.

The story has an optimistic note, for the hero "seems to see the triumph of beauty and youth, a flourishing of strength and an ardent thirst for life."

In the novella "The Lights" Chekhov rejects pessimistic philosophy, the mask of *Weltschmerz* fashionable at the end of the 1880s. The hero of the novella, the engineer Ananiev, believes that the philosophy of pessimism can destroy a person's life. The backcloth to the story, a picture of lights receding into the distance and eventually disappearing, underlines this idea: a fine new piece of engineering is being constructed, the brainchild of civilisation, which will make life easier and better organised.

In "A Dreary Tale" (1889) Chekhov raises some problems of deep concern to him, namely, the intelligentsia's place in society, its ideological searchings. These questions are embodied in the main character, Nikolai Stepanovich, a professor of medicine. The writer admires the professor as a man of great learning, a talented scholar, and reveals his tragedy, namely that he lacks a "general idea", a noble aim in life.

The professor cannot advise his ward, Katya, whom he

loves more than his own daughter, how to live. He confesses to her: "To be honest, Katya, I just don't know..." Unable to help those who are dearest to him, he is fated to be profoundly lonely.

Thomas Mann greatly admired this novella of Chekhov's, the fact that its author, a man of only twenty-nine, had been able to convey the suffering of an elderly scholar so subtly.

The stories of 1887-1889 "Enemies", "The Name-Day Party", "The Princess" and "The Nervous Breakdown" are also most significant.

The profound tragedy of the poor, hard-working doctor Kirilov and the arrogant grief of the rich aristocrat Abogin are contrasted most powerfully in the story "Enemies".

"The Nervous Breakdown" was inspired by the tragic death of the well-known Russian writer Vsevolod Garshin, a very sensitive man who committed suicide.

The hero of this story is a student who takes other people's suffering close to heart. Certain features about him remind one of Garshin, his ardent love of people, his feeling of responsibility for the sufferings of any member of society who has become the victim of social injustice.

The problem of the intelligentsia, its place in society, its searching for ways of improving the moral climate became one of the main themes of Chekhov's writing after 1880.

The story "Ward No. 6" made a shattering impression on Chekhov's contemporaries. It showed Russian life as a combination of violence and madness. This is embodied primarily in the figure of the hospital attendant Nikita who keeps order in the mental hospital Ward No. 6 with the help of his fists. The figure of Gromov, an intellectual suffering from a persecution complex, is a symbol of suffering.

Dr Ragin, who adheres to a stoic philosophy and believes that the best way of combatting life's injustices is to retreat into inner self-contemplation, ends up by being incarcerated in Ward No. 6 himself.

In the 1890s the Russian liberal intelligentsia tended to renounce lofty ideas. The "average person" who seeks to achieve "limited aims", such as setting up schools, medical centres and reading rooms in the villages and helping the poor peasants, was elevated into an ideal. The story "The House with the Mansard" (1896) condemns this attitude towards life.

The conflict in this work is revealed in the constant arguments which the hero, an artist, has with Lidya Volchaninova. The artist argues that the "medical centres and reading rooms" are pointless, even harmful. His opponent is an active supporter of "limited aims". The artist expresses some original ideas about the aims confronting the intelligentsia. He believes that physical labour should be compulsory for everyone, that the common people should be given access to true culture and education. He arrives at a rejection of the "limited" activity of the intelligentsia, because it reinforces the *status quo*.

The artist has no precise positive programme, but he is aware of the narrowness and paucity of Lidya's programme.

At root, however, the story is about callousness and humanity, about egoism, love and happiness.

Rejection of the same "limited aims" and condemnation of spiritual stagnation are at the centre of Chekhov's "little trilogy", the stories "Gooseberries", "The Man Who Lives in a Shell" and "A Story About Love" (1898). They are united by the idea of exposing "encased" life and connected by some characters present in all of them. In these stories the writer exposes the spiritual impoverishment and philistinism that had become rife in broad sections of the Russian intelligentsia. The characters in these stories renounce social ideals, and this leads to their moral decline.

Belikov ("The Man Who Lives in a Shell") is a typical bureaucrat, who is always afraid of complications and

consequences. His favourite expression "let's hope no evil will come of it" which sums up his attitude towards life, has become a classic saying.

Burkin says of him: "We were all afraid of him. Even the headmaster was. Under the influence of men like Belikov the people in our town have begun to be afraid of everything." This was the threat that the Belikovs held for society: they stifled everything vital. The Belikovs represented stagnation, the desire to throttle life, to engulf everything in a web of philistinism. This attitude towards life was engendered by Russian reality in the 1890s.

In *The Lady with the Dog* (1899) Chekhov affirms the beauty and poetry of true love which takes over a person entirely and has an ennobling effect.

As often in Chekhov, there is no denouement in *The Lady with the Dog*. The two main characters make a spiritual break with the past. They challenge the stifling petty-mindedness of the milieu in which they live.

Many of Chekhov's characters feel the need to renounce an idle life of material affluence and get closer to the people, to start an active, useful life. Examples of this are Verochka, in the story of the same name, and Misail Poloznev ("My Life"). This striving is embodied most fully, however, in Chekhov's last short story "The Bride" (1903) in the character of Nadya Shumina.

Life in Melikhovo (where Chekhov spent six years), his daily contact with the peasants and visits to patients in the outlying villages, gave him remarkable insight into peasant life. He observed the impoverishment of the countryside, which became even more marked after the famines of 1891-1892, and saw how dreadfully downtrodden and ignorant the Russian peasants were. He realised what was fettering the people's strength and making life such bitter torment for them.

In his works about the countryside the writer sought to expose the brutality, coarseness and ignorance engendered

by the existing order and, at the same time, to reveal the human warmth that dwelt in the peasant soul.

Peasant life is portrayed most fully by Chekhov in the stories "Peasants" (1897) and "In the Gully" (1900).

At the centre of "Peasants" is the Chikildeyev family. Nikolai Chikildeyev, a footman at the Slavyansky Bazaar Hotel in Moscow, falls ill and comes back to his father's house in the village. There he sees the most terrible filth and poverty. The writer shows the absence of any firm moral principles in the family, the general atmosphere of spite and hostility.

The peasants' joyless life has made them indifferent to everything, blunted their emotions and reason. They have become apathetic and passive.

The ignorance and brutality of the peasants, as Chekhov shows, is produced by the system, their oppression by the rich. The short scene in the church reveals the peasants' attitude to their masters. When the landowner's family, two young ladies with a well-dressed boy, comes into the church, Marya "gave them a grim bleak stare as if they were monsters not people".

"In the Gully" is about the family of Grigory Tsybukin, the prosperous owner of the village grocery. For the Tsybukins money is their *raison d'être.*

Chekhov shows the peasantry as a complex, heterogeneous and contradictory phenomenon in Russian life. His peasants are clever and stupid, good and bad, full of unbelief and fanatically believing, morally pure and immoral.

The logic of the characters in these two stories stated clearly that things could not be worse in the countryside and decisive social changes were essential.

Chekhov's stories are masterly in their simplicity and elegance of form. In his early period the writer developed the small genres: the comic scene, the short sketch, the joke, the feuilleton, the humorous advertisement, etc.,

often based on an anecdotal event. In the second half of the 1880s Chekhov turned predominantly to the everyday and lyrico-psychological short story.

These small genres demanded great skill in the selection and composition of the material. And Chekhov was indeed brilliant at selecting material and filling a small work with vast content. His short stories raise important moral and psychological problems and amaze one with their balance, depth and clarity.

Chekhov took as his models the works of Pushkin and Lermontov. He had an aversion to embellishment. Only refined simplicity satisfied his literary taste.

Chekhov was able to pick out an essential detail which clearly typified a person or object. And in his "Notebooks" he recorded not trivia, but important facts and collisions which threw light on people's moral make-up. Alexander Kuprin, who knew the writer well, described this very aptly: "Chekhov did not possess a particularly good external, mechanical memory. I am referring to the petty type of memory ... that consists of remembering what a person was wearing, whether he had a beard and moustache, what his watch-chain was like. But he would sum up the whole person at once, determine quickly and accurately, like an experienced chemist, his specific gravity, properties and weight and knew how to outline his main inner essence in two or three strokes."

Most writers make use of recurrent details. Chekhov, however, used this device much more frequently than other writers. Many of his stories are actually based on details. With a single detail he could evoke the background of the narrative and reveal the essence of a character.

In a number of his letters Chekhov formulated the principles of constructing a literary work, of its composition. "In art, as in life, nothing is accidental," he wrote. He always stressed that particulars are superfluous in literature. "They must be sacrificed for the sake of the whole.

Such are the physical conditions: one must write and remember that particulars, even very interesting ones, tire the attention."

Chekhov's expositions are sometimes very brief. Frequently the story begins with some trivial event (an arrival, a meeting, an illness, trouble at work, etc.) which sets the action in motion. Whereas in his early stories the writer based the opening on a comic happening, in his mature work the humorous element is reduced, the dramatic content enhanced and the psychology deepened.

In the stories written in his final period Chekhov shows virtuoso skill in constructing the plot. The "external" and "internal" plots are combined imperceptibly, the voice of the character blending with that of the narrator. Chekhov often makes use of author's digressions, which give the work an intimate lyrical tone (this is particularly obvious in "The Lady with the Dog" and "The Bride").

Chekhov believed that the end or denouement of narrative genres should contain a concentrated impression of everything portrayed.

The following motifs are characteristic of Chekhov's story endings: the realisation by the characters that they cannot go on living as they have been, that they or those around them have been wrong, or meditations on a better future. In many stories the main accent is shifted to the ending.

An important feature of the endings in Chekhov's early stories is their unexpected and sometimes paradoxical nature, as in "Death of a Clerk", "Vanka", "Misery" and "The Fat Man and the Thin Man". But the paradox is sometimes only apparent, for in fact it derives from the logic of the character and the absurdity of life itself. Therefore, in spite of a certain exaggeration in such endings, they are perfectly logical and do not detract from the authenticity of the characters and situations.

Some stories, such as "The Lady with the Dog" and

"The Teacher of Literature" have no denouement at all. The writer merely records a radical change in the characters' state of mind.

As a rule Chekhov's stories centre round one or two main characters. They are portrayed in depth, whereas the secondary characters are drawn sketchily. Often the characters are shown in an intimate love relationship, but this relationship acquires a social meaning (as in "The House with the Mansard", "The Lady with the Dog" and "A Story About Love"). Chekhov shows his characters either in a process of spiritual ennoblement and rectification or in one of moral decline.

Chekhov was able to assess the full wealth of spiritual qualities in a person. Many negative characters are dear to him also: in them, too, he perceives something human, something precious and touching as, for example, the darling in the story "The Darling", Ionych and many other characters. They are portrayed as not having quite lost their humanity.

Chekhov does not give very detailed descriptions of nature. His pictures are drawn with just a few strokes. Sometimes a landscape acquires a symbolical meaning, such as the scenes of blossoming nature in "The House with the Mansard", "The Black Friar" and "The Bride", which evoke the idea of the triumph of beauty and truth in life.

Special attention is paid to the portrait. Very often Chekhov provides just a few details of this portrait, but they are so expressive that they evoke a picture of the person as a whole. This is true of the character of Missie in "The House with the Mansard". She looks at the hero "fixing her great eyes" on his face. Further on we read: "Her thin, delicate arms showed through her wide sleeves." And further still: "Her pale face, thin neck and arms, her delicacy ... held a wistful appeal for me." These scattered brushstrokes create a portrait of Missie. Secondary charac-

ters are also shown very laconically. This is how Lyubov Ivanovna in the same story is described: "Every day I saw this lady, stout, chubby-faced, pompous, rather like a Michaelmas goose, walking about the garden, wearing Russian national costume and bead necklaces, always carrying an open parasol..."

The portraits of characters with whom the writer sympathises have a lyrical touch.

Chekhov always insisted that his narrative was objective, that the author did not "intrude", yet the reader is imperceptibly captivated by the author's intention and ethical subjectivity. And this allegedly neutral writer expressed his position very clearly.

* * *

Chekhov's plays, now world classics, were extremely innovative. He first turned to dramatic works right at the beginning of his early period. In 1886 he wrote the one-act plays *On the Harmfulness of Tobacco* and *Swan Song*. The following year he wrote the drama *Ivanov*, in which the hero perishes under the influence of a "disease" conditioned by the state of Russian society. Ivanov is a sincere, high-minded person with considerable spiritual requirements. He dreams of serving society. Yet the struggle against his base environment saps his strength. Realising his uselessness and inability to fight, he commits suicide.

Among Chekhov's dramatic works we find many vaudevilles: *The Bear* and *The Proposal* (both 1888), *The Wedding* (1889) and *The Anniversary* (1891). They are full of ebullience and merriment. These plays were popular in Chekhov's lifetime and are still to be found in many theatre repertoires today also.

Chekhov's success as a playwright began with *The Seagull*, which was completed in 1896. True, the first

production of the play at the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St Petersburg in October 1896 was a flop. The Moscow Art Theatre production in 1898, however, was a resounding success.

The service of art, the meaning of art in life and the fate of the talented artist are the main themes of the play. Nina Zarechnaya, an actress by vocation, has to endure many bitter tribulations. After being rejected by the man she loves and losing her child, she nevertheless finds the strength to become a real actress.

Chekhov rejected dramatic composition based on straightforward clashes between the characters, on a struggle which brings some defeat and others victory. In place of these external conflicts he put deep inner ones. He concentrates on revealing character, showing people not in a fight, but in their gradual realisation of the contradictions in real life. His personages' reflections on and interpretations of simple everyday phenomena are elevated into poetry and assume the form of scenic action.

Deliberately slow development of the action and reproduction of a stream of events which are outwardly not connected (in place of the traditional unity of action) are typical of Chekhov as a playwright.

In the play *Uncle Vanya* (1897) he treats the themes of ruined beauty and a wasted life.

The play *The Three Sisters,* written in 1900, was a tremendous success in the Moscow Art Theatre production put on a year later. Maxim Gorky defined the special nature of the play very perceptively. "Anton Chekhov," he wrote, "has to my mind created a completely original type of play, a lyrical comedy. When his elegant plays are performed like dramas it makes them heavy and spoils them." *

* M. Gorky and A. Chekhov, *Correspondence, articles, statements,* Moscow, 1937, p. 180 (in Russian).

Chekhov had his own interpretation of comedy. He regarded a comedy as a drama which ridicules baseness with subtle irony. He called *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* comedies and demanded that the Moscow Art Theatre producer Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko should produce them as comedies. Chekhov wanted the audience to laugh at the pointlessness of the characters' lives, to condemn Trigorin *(The Seagull)* or Ranevskaya *(The Cherry Orchard),* whose love was petty and selfish. But the audience wept instead.

Chekhov's last dramatic work was the play *The Cherry Orchard* (1903). It reflects the age of tense social relations and turbulent social movement prior to the first Russian revolution. The world of the landowners and bourgeoisie is presented in a critical light and the people striving for a new life in bright tones. In this play Chekhov responded to the most urgent questions of his day, and it impressed his contemporaries with its unusual honesty.

Although *The Cherry Orchard* is based entirely on material from everyday life, this life has a generalising, symbolical significance. Chekhov does not focus his attention on the cherry orchard as such. The orchard symbolises the whole country. ("All Russia is our orchard.") Thus the play's theme is the fate or Russia, her future. The old masters, the gentry, the Ranevskys and Gayevs, are retiring, giving way to the capitalists, the Lopakhins. But the latter's rule is to be shortlived, for they are destroyers of beauty. The real masters will come, and it is they who will turn Russia into a blossoming orchard.

The innovatory skill of Chekhov the dramatist showed itself in a new view of the world and a new system of expressing that view. The undercurrent device (important philosophical content which lies behind ordinary everyday scenes), symbols as a component of the composition, and also a special plot structure, these are the distinctive features of Chekhov's dramas. Another innovation was his

extremely elaborate system of stage directions.

Russian literature first began to be widely read abroad in the 1880s and 1890s. Turgenev, Lev Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and Chekhov literally took Europe by storm. Major foreign writers and critics alike have acknowledged the influence of the ideological and artistic conceptions of Russian literature on world literature as a whole.

Chekhov's works first appeared in translation in the 1890s beginning with the Slav countries (in Polish, Czech, Slovakian and Bulgarian) and then in German, English, French and other languages.

There was intense interest in Chekhov in England during the 1920s. English readers were attracted by such features in his characters as their dissatisfaction with life and opposition to the reality around them, and also by the psychology of the intellectual who is searching for his place in life, his "guiding idea".

At the beginning of the twentieth century Constance Garnett translated most of Chekhov's stories into English, and the Russian writer's mastery became "a magnet for young writers".

Chekhov had a great influence on such English writers as Katherine Mansfield, Bernard Shaw, J. B. Priestley and Alfred Coppard.

Katherine Mansfield regarded herself as a pupil of Chekhov's and in many respects followed him in her narrative style. From Chekhov she learned to delve deeply into life, see its social contradictions and reproduce faithfully the everyday life of ordinary people with their unremarkable tragedies. She wrote: "I have re-read *The Steppe*. What can one say? It is a simply one of the great stories of the world—a kind of *Iliad* or *Odyssey*."

She was echoed by J. B. Priestley in 1944 when he said that Chekhov's influence was enormous and that his artistic method would be adopted in the future by the finest masters of the narrative art.

The English writer Alfred Coppard (1878-1957) in a message of greeting to the Second Congress of Soviet Writers said that for forty years Chekhov's stories and plays had influenced the English novel and novella and had a profound effect on the English theatre.

The beginning of the century saw mass attacks by modernist writers on the realist story. Attacks were also made on stories by Coppard, who did not share the pessimistic views of certain of his contemporaries. Coppard felt a close affinity with Chekhov the writer and the man. He believed that the Russian writer enriched the spiritual world of his readers.

Comparing Chekhov with Maupassant, Coppard showed a preference for the Russian writer, considering that he had raised the short story to unprecedented heights. Coppard approached the question of Chekhov's objectivity correctly, challenging those who accused the Russian writer of being objectivist and pointing out that his every word radiates "deep compassion for man".

Coppard followed Chekhov's recommendation that "it is better to leave things unsaid than to say too much" in a story. He knew that Chekhov was right in maintaining that "he (the reader) will add the subjective elements that are missing". Coppard was attracted by Chekhov's reliance on the reader, on his co-participation. He also admired such features of Chekhov's writing as his ability to make the most ordinary moment in human life significant and to show a person's whole life within the restricted space of a short story.

Both Mansfield and Coppard learnt from Chekhov how to make descriptions of nature help the reader understand the characters' spiritual world.

Arnold Bennett (1867-1931), who was the first to review a book of Chekhov's stories translated by Long (1909), praised the writer highly. "Their effect is extraordinarily one of ingenuousness. Of course they are not in the least

ingenuous, as a fact, but self-conscious and elaborate to the highest degree. Read these books, and you will genuinely know something about Russia ... both volumes are indispensable to one's full education," he wrote.*

The dramatist George Calderon (1888-1915) was one of Chekhov's first translators and commentators in England. He admired Chekhov's plays and regarded them as truly innovatory. "Chekhov had that fine comedic spirit," he wrote, "which relishes the incongruity between the actual disorder of the world and the underlying order. Seeking as he did to throw our eyes outwards from the individual destiny, to discover its relation to surrounding life, he habitually mingled tragedy (which is Life seen close at hand) with comedy (which is Life seen at a distance). His plays are tragedies with the texture of comedy."**

Chekhov was also greatly admired by John Galsworthy, Frank Swinnerton, John Middleton Murry, Edward Garnett and other English writers.

Somerset Maugham, who learnt Russian in order to read Russian writers in the original, had a very high opinion of Chekhov's works. "In Chekhov ... I discovered a spirit vastly to my liking," Maugham wrote. "Here was a writer of real character, not a wild force like Dostoyevsky, who amazes, inspires, terrifies and perplexes; but one with whom you could get on terms of intimacy. I felt that from him as from no other could be learned the secret of Russia. His range was great and his knowledge of life direct."***

In another book Maugham wrote: "It was not till Mrs. Garnett brought out in thirteen little volumes a selection

* Arnold Bennett, *Books and Persons*, London, 1917, pp. 117-119.

** *Two Plays by Tchekhov*. Trans. by George Calderon, London, 1912, p. 13.

*** W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook*, London, 1952, pp. 119-120.

from his enormous output that English readers took an interest in him. Since then the prestige of Russian writers in general, and of Chekhov in particular, has been enormous. It has to a large extent transformed the composition and the appreciation of short stories... He dealt with ordinary people leading ordinary lives..." *

In the United States Chekhov first became popular in the 1920s. His plays were produced by many American theatres. American dramatists immediately appreciated the innovatory features in Chekhov's drama and frequently followed him in their works. Lillian Hellman, like many other playwrights, frankly acknowledged Chekhov's influence on her plays *The Autumn Garden* and *Toys in the Attic.*

The playwright Arthur Miller also admires Chekhov greatly. He believes that Chekhov has greatly influenced world drama. In an article published in the late fifties Miller discussed the specific features of Chekhov's drama. He strongly objected to the view of Chekhov as "an almost sentimental man and writer whose plays are elegies, postscripts to a dying age." **

Miller himself drew upon social and moral responsibility and humanism, on which all the Russian writer's works are based. Chekhov's influence can be felt in Miller's plays *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy.*

Miller stressed the social significance of Chekhov's dramas: "When Chekhov, that almost legendary subjectivist, has Vershinin—and many others in his plays—objectifying the social questions which his play has raised, he is merely placing himself within the great tradition which set its art works fully in view of the question of the survival of the race." ***

* W. Somerset Maugham, *Points of View,* New York, 1959, pp. 182, 194.

** *Harper's Magazine,* August 1958, p. 38.

*** *Harper's Magazine,* August 1958, p. 40.

The American dramatist notes the balance and harmony in Chekhov's dramas. "It is hard to imagine any playwright reading Chekhov without envying one quality of his plays. It is his balance. In this, I think he is closer to Shakespeare than any dramatist I know."*

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) learnt brilliantly from Chekhov how to make use of undercurrents. For O'Neill Chekhov's drama was of particular significance. He considered Chekhov's plays to be the most perfect plays without a plot and saw them as models of high drama full of poetic atmosphere and great lyrical force.

From Chekhov O'Neill learnt how to create a musical mood and also to renounce elaborate plots and love stories.

The Irish writer and dramatist Sean O'Casey (1884-1964) also admired Chekhov's writing greatly. "There is little that can be sanely said about Chekhov," he wrote in 1954, "for he is too great, too many-sided to be measured. He goes around in his own light, and we can but see him and listen to his gentle voice full of melody and grace and truth. A man of the people, he took hold of their words and deeds, their longings and fears, made them into songs, and sent them forth to sing themselves; for these stories are songs, and his plays songs too, magical music muted."**

O'Casey saw in Chekhov's plays a longing for the great Russia of the future. "Moscow, oh, Moscow!" he wrote. "That city seemed then to be the one place where there was light and colour and adventure. Today Moscow is much more important, not only to Russia, but to the whole world."*** How relevant these words sound today also!

The innovatory nature and world importance of Chekhov was well defined by the English actor Paul

* *Harper's Magazine*, August 1958, p. 38.

** Sean O'Casey, "On Chekhov", *National Affairs*, Toronto, 1954, Vol. XI, No. 10, p. 19.

*** Sean O'Casey, "On Chekhov", *National Affairs*, Toronto, 1954, Vol. XI, No. 10, p. 20.

Scofield: "Chekhov is one of the most national writers. His characters are purely Russian. But the problems which concern Chekhov's characters—happiness and unhappiness, family life and tribulations—are the same for the peoples of all countries."*

It is indicative that many foreign writers and critics have understood the striving towards the future in Chekhov's works. This feature of Chekhov's writing was noted by the Englishman John Middleton Murry (1889-1957). At a time when Western literature was running into one dead end after another, Murry wrote, in Russia the unknown Chekhov clearly saw and understood which paths to take. He went on to say that people in England were just beginning to sense how close Chekhov was to them, and perhaps they would soon realise how infinitely he had outdistanced them.

Over the last three decades interest in Chekhov has grown in academic circles of the United States and Britain. Many books and countless articles and reviews have been published on his work. His creative path is studied at many universities and colleges in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The study of Chekhov's realism continues. "It (theatrical realism) was new in its approach and revelations; new in the poetry it possessed though masquerading as prose, and new in its style and dimensions," wrote John Mason Brown.**

Chekhov's popularity in France also began with the success of his plays. But Chekhov the prosewriter has also been dear to French readers for many years. They were first introduced to him in 1895 by such critics as the Slavist Jules Legras who published in Paris a book entitled *In the Land of Russia*, in which he described his meeting with

---

* *Literaturnaya gazeta* for 1 January, 1968.

** John Mason Brown, "The Sea Gull and the Phoenix", *Saturday Review*, May 29, 1954, p. 22.

Chekhov at Melikhovo. In this book he refers to Chekhov as an outstanding young writer.

The French critic André Beaunier wrote, "His elegant and precise manner of writing, accuracy of portrayal, austere and bold simplicity of style and profound compassion for his characters, all this taken together, for all its modesty, constitutes a clearly expressed, unusually noble and noteworthy portrait of the writer. Anton Chekhov is unusually original." *

For the last three decades Chekhov and Dostoyevsky have been the most popular Russian writers in France. Several books have been published on Chekhov, including Elsa Triolet's well-known *History of Anton Chekhov* (Paris, 1954) and numerous articles. In 1956 *Platonov* was put on at the Paris People's National Theatre. In the 1950s nearly all Chekhov's plays, *The Seagull, The Cherry Orchard, Ivanov, Uncle Vanya* and *The Three Sisters,* were performed on the Paris stage. The critics were unanimous in acclaiming them and noting their innovatory nature.

Chekhov's collected works in French were published in 1922-1956 in eighteen volumes, and in the late fifties in fourteen volumes. Translations of individual works are coming out constantly.

Chekhov's works have been translated just as intensively in the countries of the Middle and Far East, particularly in Japan. Chekhov began to be read in Japan during his lifetime, in China during the 1910s and in Korea during the 1920s. He has played an appreciable part in the formation of realist literature in these countries.

The circle of Chekhov's readers is growing in all parts of the world. Interest in his work shows that Russian literature is finding readers who appreciate its truth, humanism and high artistic mastery.

Chekhov delved deep into Russian national character

* André Beaunier, *Eloges,* Paris, 1909.

and reflected the course of Russian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Maxim Gorky summed up Chekhov like this: "One of Russia's best friends, intelligent, impartial and truthful." Lev Tolstoy said of him: "Chekhov is an incomparable artist. Yes, yes... Incomparable... An artist of life... And the value of his work lies in the fact that it is understandable and close not only to all Russians, but to all people in general."

In Chekhov's many-sided writing readers are bound to find moods and motifs familiar to them. The fame of this great writer, whose 125th birth anniversary was celebrated throughout the Soviet Union and many other countries in 1985, is constantly growing. He is one of the most widely read writers in the whole world.

Andrei Zakharkin